The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

$1500 FIRST PRIZE STORY IN THIS ISSUE

APRIL 1962

WINNER OF FIRST PRIZE

CORNELL WOOLRICH's

One Drop of Blood

a memorable example of the "inverted" detective story

AVRAM DAVIDSON

VICTOR CANNING

ANTHONY BOUCHER

MARK VAN DOREN

A DAVIS PUBLICATION

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

including **BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

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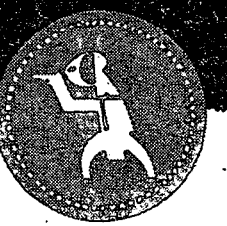

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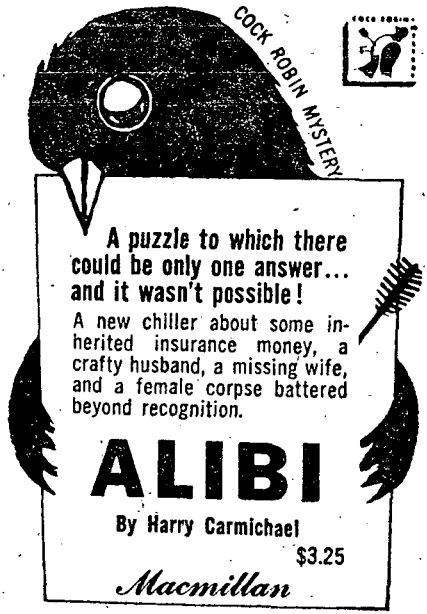

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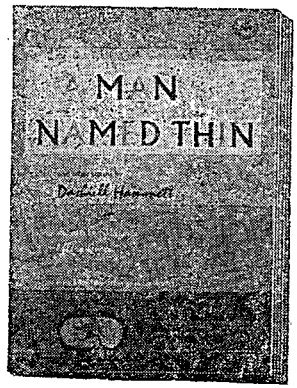

A MAN NAMED THIN

and other stories by
DASHIELL HAMMETT

Edited and with introduction by
ELLERY QUEEN

This is the ninth and final collection of Hammett short stories to be published by Mercury Press. (The preceding eight (8) books in this series are now all out of print). In addition to the title story, the other stories are WAGES OF CRIME, THE GATEWOOD CAPER, THE BARBER AND HIS WIFE, ITCHY THE DEBONAIR, THE SECOND-STORY ANGEL, IN THE MORGUE and WHEN LUCK'S RUNNING GOOD, each with a special editorial note by Ellery Queen.

These eight (8) stories, complete and unabridged, are appearing in book form for the first time. 50¢ at most newsstands or direct from the publishers.

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REPORT ON EQMM's 1961 CONTEST

IN THE LAST three weeks of *EQMM's* 1961 contest we were deluged with submissions. For a time it looked as if we would not be able to finish reading all the stories before our absolute deadline—it seemed a superhuman task! But by dint of extraordinary effort on the part of our staff, for which the Editors now offer their deep and sincere gratitude, we finally weighed and assayed every manuscript, and came to that most harrowing of moments—the moment of decision.

Here are the prize-winning stories in one of our most exciting contests (all groups of stories listed below are in alphabetical order, according to authors' surnames). The winner of the $1500.00 First Prize appears in this issue, and the six Second Prize winners ($500.00 each) will be published in forthcoming issues. The names of some of the authors speak for themselves, and the titles of all the stories are like magical incantations . . .

FIRST PRIZE

Cornell Woolrich's *One Drop of Blood*

SECOND PRIZES

Margaret Austin's *Introducing Ellery's Mom*
Harold R. Daniels' *Inquest on a Dead Tiger*
Dorothy Salisbury Davis' *By the Scruff of the Soul*
Stanley Ellin's *The Question My Son Asked*
Pat McGerr's *Justice Has a High Price*
Hugh Pentecost's *A Kind of Murder*

The following 20 stories missed winning Second Prizes by an editorial eyelash; but they were purchased at our regular rates and will appear in *EQMM* during the next year:

George Sumner Albee's *The Talking Tree*
Charlotte Armstrong's *The Other Shoe*
Richard Banks's *Roboticide Squad*
William E. Barrett's *Nobody Would Believe It*
Phyllis Bentley's *Miss Phipps Discovers America*
Marjorie Carleton's *Monday Is a Quiet Place*
Youngman Carter's *The Most Wanted Man in the World*
Avram Davidson's *Revolver*
Jacob Hay's *The Reformation of Fogarty*
Patricia Highsmith's *The Gracious, Pleasant Life of Mrs. Afton*

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Harry Kemelman's *The Adelphi Bowl*
Rufus King's *The Gods, To Avenge . . .*
Don Knowlton's *The Curious Quints*
Harold Q. Masur's *Squealer's Reward*
Margaret Millar's *The People Across the Canyon*
H. C. Neal's *The Pegasus Pilfer*
Frederick Nebel's *Needle in a Haystack*
Talmage Powell's *Somebody Cares*
Holly Roth's *As With a Piece of Quartz*
Mark Van Doren's *This Other Honor*

. . . the titles are magical incantations indeed, and the stories themselves, sheer sorcery . . . of crime, detection, suspense, and (we warn you now) preternatural mystery.

As you know, one of our deepest interests is the finding of new authors and the publishing of "first stories." The 1961 contest was particularly successful in attracting the work of talented beginners. In all, we purchased no less than 15 "first stories," and the special prize of $500.00 went to

BEST "FIRST STORY"

Alice Scanlan Reach's *In the Confessional*

OTHER "FIRST STORIES"

L. E. Behney's *On the Road to Jericho*
Raleigh Bond's *Tear a Passion to Tatters*
K. T. Edwards' *A Matter of Judgment*
Edward Forbes's *The Man Who Heard Whispers*
Herb Goldstein's *Go Play With Your Sister*
William North Jayme's *I Will Please Come To Order*
Pat Wallace Latner's *Trouble House*
Magnus Ludens' *The Red Eggs*
Robert Pickering's *A Lesson in Logic*
Susan Sears's *You Can Never Tell About People*
Clyde Shaffer's *The Day the Sheriff's Dog Died*
Jane Speed's *According to Plan*
Thomas P. Stone's *A Time for Tea*
Leatrice Wigginton's *Vengeance Is Mine . . .*

Dear Readers, you truly have a banquet of satisfying and succulent reading ahead of you. We humbly suggest that you do not miss a single issue of *EQMM* in the months to come—or you may miss some of the finest short stories of crime, detection, and suspense that it has been our privilege to offer you in many years.

—Ellery Queen

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WINNER OF FIRST PRIZE

The First Prize Winner this year is Cornell Woolrich's "One Drop of Blood," a memorable example of the contemporary inverted-detective story . . . The first two-thirds of the story deals with the crime—and the events leading up to it; the last one-third of the story deals with the detection—and how the detective proved it. Mr. Woolrich poses this question: Can a man commit murder without premeditation, and be clever enough, thorough enough, to get away with it?

Mr. Woolrich poses other questions. As in some Woolrich short stories, the detective is anonymous, and in this story even the criminal has no name. Is the murderer Everyman? Is the detective, the murderer's nemesis, Everyman?

"One Drop of Blood" is surely one of Cornell Woolrich's most absorbing stories—with a startling, satisfying, and original solution—and with remarkable "suspension of disbelief."

ONE DROP OF BLOOD

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

I: The Crime—and the Events Leading Up to It

HE DIDN'T PREMEDITATE IT, AND YET, HE TOLD HIMSELF AFTERWARD, IT all turned out better than if he had. Much better. He might have done all the wrong things, he told himself. Picked the wrong place, the wrong time, the wrong weapon. Too much careful planning ahead might have made him nervous, as it had many another. In the effort to remember *not* to forget something, he might have forgotten *something else*. How often that had happened!

This way, there was nothing to forget—because there had been nothing to remember in the first place. He just walked through the whole thing "cold," for the first time, without having had any rehearsal. And everything just seemed to fall into place—the right place, by itself. These hair-split timetables are very hard to stick to. Impromptu, the way he did it, the time element doesn't become important. You can't trip over a loose thirty seconds and fall flat on your face when there aren't a loose thirty seconds to trip over.

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The situation itself was old and trite. One of the oldest, one of the tritest. Not to him, of course, and not to her—it never is to those involved. It's always new, first-time-new.

To begin with, he was single, and had no troubles whatsoever to deal with. He had a car, he had a job, he had health, and he had good looks. But mainly, he had freedom. If he came home at ten o'clock or if he came at two, if he had one drink or if he had a few, there was no one but himself to keep score.

He was the personification of the male spirit, that restless roving spirit that can only get into trouble because it didn't have any trouble to start with, that had no other way to go but—from lack of trouble into a mess of trouble.

And so we find him one star-spiked May evening, in a $95 suit, with $75 in his wallet, with a new convertible waiting outside to take him in any direction he wanted to go, and with a girl named Corinne in his arms—a very pretty Corinne too, dexterously dancing and spinning around together, breaking apart, coming together again, and above all (a favorite step of theirs) making an overhead loop of their two hands so that she could walk through it, turn, then go back through it again. All in excellent time and in excellent rhythm to the tune of *The Night They Invented Champagne*, played by an excellent band.

Beautiful to watch, but what a fatal dance that was, because—it was their first together. They should have turned and fled from each other in opposite directions.

Instead they went out to the car. She patted it admiringly as he beamed, proudly possessive as only a young male car-owner can be. Then they drove to where she lived, sat a while and watched the stars, and kissed and kissed, and watched the stars . . . and that was it.

Another night, another dance, same car, same stars, same kisses—or same lips, anyway. She got out to go in. He got out to keep her from going in. Then they both got in the car again and went to a motel . . . And that was it again.

After some time had gone by, she asked him about marriage. But she didn't get much of an answer. He liked it the way it was. She hadn't asked him soon enough, or in the right order of things. So, afraid that she would lose him altogether, and preferrring to have him this way rather than no way at all, she didn't ask him again.

It was a peaceful, comfortable existence. It was definitely not sordid—she was not a sordid girl. She was no different, in effect, from any other girl on her street who had stepped out and married. Only she had stepped out and not married. He was the first man she had ever loved, and it

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stopped there. The only thing was, she had left freedom of action, freedom of choice, entirely in his hands—which was a tactical error of the worst sort in the never-ending war between the sexes. She was a very poor soldier, for a woman. They were not actually living together. They were keeping company, one might say, on a permanent basis.

At any rate, one night when he called to take her out, she complained of not feeling well. In fact, it was easy to see she wasn't shamming, and noticing that she was alternately shivering and burning up, he sent for a doctor and remained there while the doctor examined her. (She spoke of him as her fiancé whenever it became necessary in front of a third person.) It was nothing serious—merely an attack of the flu, but she had to go to bed.

He would not—to give him some credit—have walked out on her then and there; but she was feeling so miserable that for her part she wished he would leave her alone. So, noticing this, he kissed her—a mere peck—and left.

His original intention—at least, from the door to the car—was to go to his own apartment and make the best of an unexpected solitary evening. But the stars were at their dirty work again, and his wrist watch didn't help either (9:48); he was 28 and *didn't* have the flu, so—

Her name was Allie.

And she wasn't going to be like Corinne—he found that out right from the start. She could enjoy the stars, sure, and she could kiss, sure, but she'd take up both those occupations on his time, as his officially credited fiancée or his lawfully wedded wife—not on her own time, as a free-lance, if you get the distinction.

And her sense of timing was much better, too. He came out three or four kisses short the first meeting. So he wanted to see her again, to try to make up the shortage. But she always knew just when to stop. He was still a couple short the second meeting, so that made him want to see her a third time. By then he was so hopelessly in hock to her that his only chance of clearing up the debt was to marry her, and try to work it out on a lifetime payment plan.

She was a five-star general in the battle of the sexes. And it must have been inborn, because she'd never heard a shot fired until she met him.

At first he managed to sandwich the two of them in together. He saw Allie a couple of nights in the week, saw Corinne a couple of others. In fact, he would have liked to continue this three-way-stretch arrangement indefinitely; the difficulty, however, lay not with them but with himself. Soon more and more nights with Corinne reminded him of the night she'd had the flu: the stars above and the wrist watch were

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there, but not Corinne's stars any more and not Corinne's time. A waste of Allie's time, instead.

Finally there were no more nights with Corinne—just one last station-break and the program went off the air.

"You've lost interest in me. I'm not blind. I've noticed it for some time now."

"That's the chance you have to take," he told her, "when you're in love."

"But why didn't it happen to you?" she wanted to know, "and not to me? Shouldn't we both come out even?"

"You don't come out even in love," he told her. "Someone always has to come out behind." And then he added, "I'll call you up some night." Which is the way some men say goodbye to a woman when they're finished with the campaign.

She'll find somebody else, he thought; she was easy for me, she'll be easy for the next one. And he shrugged her off.

But there are three things in this world you can't shrug off: death, taxes—and a girl who loves you.

Now they were in the homestretch, Allie and he. Now when they looped their hands above their heads on the dance floor, her engagement-diamond blazed toward the lights, proclaiming, "This is mine. Hands off." Not to jewel thieves, but to stealers of men.

Now all the tribal customs were brought to bear—everything the world insists shall surround the lawful mating of a man and a woman. The meetings with the relatives from far-off places; the luncheons, dinners, parties, showers; the choosing of a trousseau; the finding of their first home; even the purchase of the furniture that was to go into it.

Now the date was set, the license applied for, the church reserved, the flowers and the caterers and the champagne arranged for. Now even the blood tests were taken, and they were both declared pure. All that remained was the marrying and the honeymoon.

Now the boys got together and gave him his bachelor party, his last night to howl. And the howls were something to hear. Three separate times around town they were arrested *en masse,* and twice the arresting officers not only released them but even accompanied them for a short part of the way, and the third time wished them well and urged them only to "keep it down, boys." Then finally the last two survivors, the diehards whose pledge had been to see him safely home, had him at his door, and after much fumbling with keys, and draping of arms across shoulders, and swaying and tottering, they thrust him inside, closed the door, and left him.

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And suddenly he was sober, stone-cold, ice-cold sober, and the whole party had been a waste of liquor—at least, for him.

Corinne was sitting there. Waiting for him.

"You took so long to get back," she complained mildly. "I knew you still lived here, but I thought you'd never get back."

"Had a little party," he said. He was starkly sober, but his tongue hadn't yet quite caught up with the rest of him. A warning bell started ringing: I wonder if she knows, I wonder if she knows.

"I'm not criticizing," she went on. "You're free to go out with your pals—free every night in the week. It's only natural, so what's the harm?"

The warning bell stopped suddenly. There was silence. She doesn't know, he told himself, *and she's not going to know from me.*

Business of fooling around with a cigarette, so he'd use up time and wouldn't have to say too much to her. Maybe she'd go away.

"I know it's late," she said.

He looked at the wrist watch that had played such a double-crossing part in their little story. Meaning, it is late.

She doesn't want to start over again, does she? For Pete's sake, not that! Love is a one-way street.

"Aren't you working?" he asked. "Don't you have to get up early in the morning?"

"I haven't been working since last week," she said. Then, understandingly, "You're tired; I know."

"Aren't you?"

"Yes, but I do have to talk to you about something. I've got to. It's very important."

Now he knew, more or less. There were only two things a girl could possibly want from a man, in all the world, in all this life: love or money. And since love was out, that left only money. Another thing told him: she was much too tractable, noticeably taking pains not to antagonize or ruffle him in any way.

"Won't it keep till tomorrow?" he said by way of acquiescence. "I'm beat. Completely beat. I'll come over to see you tomorrow."

"But will you?" she asked, frowning, but still with that air of not wanting to push him, not wanting to crowd him.

"Aw, for the love of Mike, Cor," he said impatiently, "when did you ever know me to break my word to you?"

It was true. He never had—not in the little things.

She had to accept that—it was the best she could get.

"I've moved since the last time I saw you," she said, and gave him the new address.

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"All right, I'll be there, Allie," he promised. He was almost nudging the door inch by inch right in her face, anxious to get rid of her.

For a moment he lost an inch or two. "Allie?" she said. "Who's Allie?"

"That's Al," he said quickly. "Fellow I go around with—with him tonight. I'm so used to saying his name every five minutes or so."

He finally got the door shut and went "Whew!"—from the shoelaces up. Money, he said, that's all it is—she wants money. That hint about not working. All right, I'll give her some. Wind the thing up that way. She was entitled to something after all, he supposed.

He took five hundred out of his savings account the next day, during his lunch hour. The nick it made wasn't too bad. There was still plenty to cover the honeymoon expenses and the first few months of married life. And he was making a good salary.

Then right in front of the bank, coming out, he met Dunc, Allie's brother. Dunc glanced up at the bank façade, then at him, and said, "Look, if you could use a little extra—I know how it is at a time like this, I went through the mill myself three years ago."

Bing! another two hundred and fifty from Dunc, smack in his palm. His face didn't even change color. After all, they were both going to be in the same family, weren't they?

First, he thought, I'll put two fifty on my own back. Then he thought, why be a rat—let her have it all, it's only money. So she was coming out pretty good for a last year's leftover crush; she had no kick coming. She'll fall all over my neck, he thought complacently. But no fooling around tonight; I'm going to unwind her arms and give them back to her.

The bungalow was 'way out at the end of nowhere—dim in the growing darkness. Even the road in front of it wasn't paved yet, just surfaced with some kind of black stuff. But there were going to be other bungalows—he could just make out the skeleton frames of some of them already starting up in a straight line past hers, getting thinner as they went along, until there were only foundations, then just a bulldozer.

She had it fixed up real pretty, the way women like to do, even women with broken hearts. Chintz curtains fluttering out the windows, like vermilion lips coaxing to be kissed.

She didn't even give him a chance to get onto the porch and ring the bell. She was waiting there for him. She had on a little apron to match the curtains. Last year's love, playing house all by herself.

"I wasn't sure you were really coming."

He raised his brows. "Did I ever break my word to you?"

"No," she said. "Not your word. Only—"

She had cocktails frosting in a shaker.

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"You used to like martinis best," she said.

He looked at her. "I don't like martinis any more," he said, and let that sink in.

She traced a finger on the frosting of the shaker and made a little track, shiny as a mirror. "I've got to talk to you."

"We don't have to," he said. "This talks better than anything. This talks best." He'd taken the money out and laid it down.

"What's that for?" she said, her face suddenly white with shock and insult and hurt.

"Well, if you don't know why, don't ask me."

She sat in a chair for a few moments getting over it—or, it would be more correct to say, getting familiar with it. She had a slow temper. Until this moment, as a matter of fact, he hadn't known she had any temper at all.

Then she got up, and her face was unlike any face he'd ever seen her wear before. She flung the words point-blank at him.

"You don't have to do *this* to me! You don't have to do *this* to me!"

"Then what else is there?" In all honesty he couldn't understand her outrage. He'd lost her train of thought, and the situation was becoming an irritant.

"What *else* is there? You have to stand by me, that's what else there is! I can't go it alone!"

Now his voice went up, almost into a wail of incomprehension. "Stand by you! What does that mean?"

She took her open hand and slammed it down on the table, so hard that the ice in the shaker went *tlink!* "I'm going to have your baby, that's what that means!"

The shock was dizzying. He had to reach out and hold on to something for a moment.

"How do I—?"

"There never was another man in my life, that's how you know."

And he did know.

"All right," he said.

"All right what?"

"I'll take care of everything. Hospital and—"

Now finally she screamed piercingly at him in her passion and torment, and she wasn't the kind to scream. "Hospital? I don't want a hospital, I want a husband!"

The second shock, on top of the first, completely unbalanced him. The rest was just physical reflex, not mental reaction at all.

She said only one thing more in her life. In her entire life.

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"You're going to marry me, do you understand? You're going to *marry* me!"

The object was suddenly in his hand, as though it had jumped into his hand of its own accord. He hadn't seen it before, hadn't even known it was in the room.

She died at almost the very first blow. But he kept striking on and on and on, to the point of frenzy, to the point of mania, to the point of sheer hallucination. And then she was gone, and it was over. And the thing that a hundred other men, a thousand other men, had done, and that he'd thought he'd never do—now he'd done it too. And the thing he'd read about a hundred times, a thousand times, now he wasn't reading about it, he was living it. And he liked it much better the other way.

He looked at the object he was still holding, and he realized he actually didn't know what it was even now. What could have been more unpremeditated than that? Some sort of long curving blade, razor-keen. Then at last he identified it—more by hearsay than by actual recognition. A Samurai sword, souvenir of the long-ago war with Japan. He remembered now she had once mentioned she had a brother who had served in the Pacific theater—only to come back and die in a car crash not long after. Many men had brought these back with them at the time.

He let go, and it dropped with a muffled thud.

After a while he located the bracket she had driven into the wall. It must have been hanging up there. When he went over to it he found, on the floor underneath, the severed cord it had hung by and the empty scabbard. His subconscious mind must have recognized it for a weapon, for he had no recollection whatever of snatching it down, and yet he must have, in the blinding red explosion that had burst in his brain and ended in murder.

In the beginning he was very mechanical, as the glaze of shock that coated him all over slowly thawed and loosened. He tipped the cocktail shaker into one of the two glasses and drank. He even ate one of the two olives she'd had ready at the bottoms of the two glasses. Not calloused. His instinct told him he needed it, if he wanted to try to live. And he wanted to try to live very badly. Even more so now that he'd looked at death this close with his own eyes. Then he poured a second one, but let it stand. Then he emptied what remained in the shaker down the sink.

It seemed hopeless. There seemed no place to begin. The room was daubed with her, as though a house painter had taken a bucket of her blood, dipped his paint brush in it, then splashed it this way and that way and every which way all over the walls. He was splattered himself,

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but fortunately he was wearing a dark suit and it didn't show up much; and that part of the job could wait until later.

The first thing to do was to get her out of here. All the little hers . . . He went to her closet and found a number of opaque plastic garment bags—even more than he needed, in fact . . . and finally he zippered them up securely and let them lean there a moment.

Then he went out to his car, opened the trunk compartment, and made room. He went around to the front seat, got the evening newspaper that he remembered having left there, and papered the entire trunk with it, to prevent any errant stains or smears. It was so incredibly unpeopled out here that he didn't even have to be furtive about it. Just an occasional precautionary look around him.

Then he went in again, brought out the garment bags, put them in the trunk, and locked it. He stepped back into the bungalow to put out the lights, took her key with him so he'd be able to get back in again, got in his car, and drove off.

And as far as that part went, that was all. There was nothing more to it.

He drove steadily for some hours. And strangely enough, at a rather slow pace, almost a desultory glide. He could do that because, again strangely enough, he felt no panic whatever. Even his fear was not acute or urgent. It would be untrue to say that he felt no fear at all; but it was distant and objective, rather than imminent and personal—more on the level of ordinary prudence and caution. And this must have been because it had all come up so suddenly, and blown over so suddenly, that his nerves hadn't had time to be subjected to a long, fraying strain. They were the nerves of an almost normal person, not of a man who had just taken another person's life.

He even stopped once, left the car, and bought a fresh pack of cigarettes at a place he saw was still open. He even stayed there for a few moments, parked in front of it, smoking, then finally slithered on again.

At last his driving stopped being directionless, took on purpose, as he finally made up his mind about a destination. There was very little noticeable change in it, and he still didn't hurry. He simply made fewer haphazard turns and roundabouts, and perhaps stepped it up another five miles per hour.

Even with a target, he still continued driving for several more hours. The metropolitan section was now left far behind. On the final lap he was purring steadily along a road that paralleled a railroad right-of-way. An occasional pair of lights would blink past him going the other way. There was nothing for anyone else to see or recall—just a relaxed silhouette behind the wheel, with a red coal near its lips, and tooling

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by. Although a good, wide road, it was not a main artery of traffic.

More than half the night had now gone by, but he still drove on. This had to be done, and when a thing has to be done, it should be done right, no matter how much time it takes.

At last, as he neared the outskirts of a large-sized town, the railroad tracks broadened into numerous sidings, and these blossomed finally into strings of stagnant freight cars of assorted lengths, some only two or three coupled together, others almost endless chains.

He came to a halt finally by the side of the road, took out a flashlight, and left the car. He disappeared into one of the dark lanes between the freight cars, an occasional soft crunch of gravel the only indication of his movements. He was gone for some time, taking his time in this as in everything else. Almost like a shopper shopping for something that exactly suits him, and refusing to be satisfied with anything less.

When he came back to his car there was very little more to it. He went out to the middle of the road, stood there first looking up one way, then down the other. When he was sure there were no lights approaching even in the remotest distance, he stepped over to his car, moving deftly and quickly but still by no means frightenedly, opened the trunk, and took out the garment bags. He propped them for a moment against the car while he took the precaution of closing the trunk, so that it might not attract attention in case anyone should drive by while he was gone.

Then, half supporting and half trailing the garment bags, he disappeared into the lane of his choice between the parallels of freight cars —the one that led to the freight car he had found with its door left unfastened. There was the sound of the slide grating open, then in a few moments the sound of it grating closed again. And that was all.

When he came back to the car he was alone, unburdened.

The drive back was as uneventful as the drive out. If he had been of a cynical nature, he might have been tempted to ask: What's there to a murder? What's there to worry about?

In due course he came back to the point where the route that led out to her bungalow diverged from the route that would eventually bring him to his own apartment. He didn't even hesitate. He took the road home. He was taking a gamble of a sort, and yet it wasn't as great a gamble as it appeared; he felt now that the longer odds were in his favor, and besides, there was nothing more he could do in her bungalow at this time. She had told him she had stopped working. There was a good chance no one would go there to seek her out during the course of the next day or two. And if someone should, there was an even better chance they would not force entry into the bungalow.

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So he decided to go home, leave the bloodstained room the way it was for the time being, and not return until after he'd had a chance to make the necessary preparations for cleaning it up.

He set his alarm for nine, and slept the three hours remaining until then. Which is three hours more sleep than the average murderer can usually get on the first night following his crime.

When he awoke it was Saturday morning, and without even breakfasting he went to a paint store completely across town from where he lived and explained to the clerk that his so-and-so of a landlord wouldn't paint for him; so he was going to do the job himself and be damned to him.

The man in the paint store was sympathetic. "What color you want?" he asked.

"What color would you advise?"

"What color is it now?"

He picked it out with positive accuracy on a color chart the man showed him.

"Well, your best bet to cover that would be either a medium green or a medium brown," the clerk said. "Otherwise the color on now is going to show through and you'd have to give it two coats."

He thought of the color of dried blood and promptly selected the brown—a sort of light cinnamon with a reddish overtone. Then he bought a like shade of glossy paint for the woodwork, a ladder, and the requisite brushes and mixing fluids. Then he went to a clothing store—not a haberdashery but the sort of outlet that sells work clothes—and purchased a pair of overalls, and added a pair of gauntlets so that he wouldn't get any paint under his fingernails. Such a thing could be the devil to pay.

Then he went back to where he'd killed her.

It was only just past mid-morning when he got there. This time he drove off the unpaved roadway, detoured around to the back of the bungalow, and parked directly behind it in such a way that the house itself hid his car.

There was really no need for this precaution. Being Saturday, the neighborhood was empty—no workmen, no residents; but he felt better taking every possible safeguard, even against an unlikely prowler.

Then on foot he circled around to the front and examined the porch before unloading anything from his car. It was just as he had left it. There was every evidence that his gamble had paid off, that no one had come near the bungalow since it had happened. From a remark she had dropped at his place when they were setting up what had turned

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out to be the murder appointment, he knew she had no telephone. She was on the waiting list but they hadn't got to her yet. From their old days together he remembered she had never been much of a newspaper reader, so it was extremely improbable she would have regular delivery service, especially in this deserted section. As for milk, there were no signs of that either; she must have brought home a carton from the grocery store whenever she needed it. Finally, the mail slot opened directly into the house itself, so there was no way of telling from the outside whether the mail had been picked up by its recipient or not.

There wasn't a single thing that wasn't in his favor. He almost marveled at it himself.

He gave another precautionary look around, then opened up the front door with her key, and went in.

For a moment—and for the first time—his heart almost failed him. It looked even worse than he'd remembered from the night before. Maybe he'd been too taken up with removing her to give it due notice. There was only one wall that was completely sterile. Two more were in bad-to-middling shape. But the fourth was practically marbleized, it had such veins and skeins twining all over it. It resembled nothing so much as a great upright slab of white-and-brown marble.

He could see what had caused the marbleized effect. It wasn't that the blood had spurted of its own accord: it was the strokes of the Samurai sword that had splashed it like that—all over everything.

It was too big a job; he felt he could never swing it.

And then he reminded himself: you got rid of her body, didn't you? If you did that, you can do this too.

He then did another of those incongruous things that he kept doing all the way through. He picked up the shaker from the night before, got out the gin and the vermouth, and made himself two more martinis. He left out the olives though.

Feeling more confident now, he changed to his work clothes. He even took off his shoes and remained in his socks. Paint spots on shoes could be just as hard to remove and just as incriminating as paint underneath fingernails.

When he began the new paint job, he realized that he didn't have to be too finicky about it—they couldn't arrest you just because your painting wasn't up to major league standards. The daubing went as fast as a speed-cop's motorcycle on the way with a ticket. Almost before he knew it, he had all four sides done, including the one that hadn't needed it. This latter he threw in by way of artistic flourish. The room would have looked queer with three walls one color and the fourth another.

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The ladder folded, the buckets out of the way, the overalls and gauntlets stripped off, he stood in the center of the room and took a comprehensive look at his handiwork—and drew a deep sigh. Not only of relief, but somewhat of cocksure pride.

It might not have been the best paint job that had ever been done, but it guaranteed one thing: the walls were bloodless; the damning stains were completely covered up.

The furniture, of course, was going to be a different matter. Fortunately, the cushions on the settee and chair were removable. But the rug was an impossibility—nothing could be done with it. Again, fortunately, it wasn't outsized, the room itself being fairly small. He rolled up the rug and stood it in a corner, just inside the front door.

This part of the program, he knew, would be less arduous than the walls, but it was also going to be a good deal more risky. It necessitated arson.

He slipped out and made a tour of inspection of the skeleton bungalows that sprouted past hers, giving the interior of each one a quick glance.

The first three were too close to hers for his purpose—the inference might be a little too easy to draw. The one at the opposite end was nothing but a gouged-out foundation and poured concrete. The next-to-the-last already had its two-by-fours up, but no flooring or roofing. The next one in had enough wooden construction—plus a lot of shavings—to be ideal: it was like starting a fire in an empty lathe-basket.

Three trips were necessary. He carried the rolled rug, the removable cushions from settee and chair, a small end-table, a parchment lampshade, and whatever else had been stained beyond hope of cover-up, to the unfinished bungalow. He didn't forget to include the suit he had worn the night before. He made a pyre of these, topped it off with the paint-impregnated overalls, gauntlets, and brushes, and poured on the highly inflammable residue from the paint cans themselves.

Then he drained gas from his car, using a receptacle he'd brought from the bungalow, leaving just enough in the tank to get him home, and liberally doused it not only on the mound itself but on the wood around it.

He turned his car around, facing in the direction he was to go, killed the engine, and sat waiting, looking all around him. Finally he started the engine again, very softly, like a newborn kitten purring, picked up a furled newspaper, took a lighter out of his pocket, clicked it twice to make sure it was in working order, got out of the car leaving the door open in readiness, and went inside the unfinished house.

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He came out again at a run—this was the first time since he'd killed her that he moved fast—jumped in the car and started off with a surge. He only closed the door after he was careening along, foot tight to the floor. This part of the operation, if no other, was split-second schedule, and not a stray moment could be spared.

For as long as the place remained in sight behind him, he could see no sign of flickering flame, of incipient fire. After that—who was around to care?

He got out in front of his own door, locked the car, tossed his keys jauntily up into air and caught them deftly in the same hand.

Upstairs, he sprawled out in a chair, legs wide apart, and let out a great sigh of completion, of finality.

"Now let them say I've killed her." Then, sensibly, he amended it to: "Now let them *prove* I killed her."

II. The Detection—and How They Proved It

They did neither the one nor the other. They started very circumspectly, very offhandedly, in a very minor key—as those things often happen.

A ring at the doorbell.

Two men were standing there.

"Are you—?"

"Yes, I'm—"

"Like to ask you a few questions. Mind if we come in?"

"Come in if you want. I have no objections. Why should I?"

"Do you know a Corinne Matthews?"

"I did at one time."

"When was the last time you saw her?"

"What is this—June, isn't it? Either late February or early March. I'm not sure which."

"Not since then?"

"You asked me a minute ago and I told you. If I'd seen her since then, I'd say so."

"Not since then. That's your statement?"

"My statement, right."

"Any objection to coming downtown with us? We'd like to question you in further detail."

"You're the police. When you ask people to come downtown with you, they come downtown with you. No objection."

They came back again that evening. He went down again the next day. Then back again, down again. Then—

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Down again for good.

Held on suspicion of murder.

A back room. Many different rooms, but a back room in particular.

"I suppose now you're going to beat the hell out of me."

"No, we're not going to beat the hell out of you—never do. Besides, we're too sure of you; we don't want anything to backfire. Juries are funny sometimes. No, we're going to treat you with kid gloves. In fact, you're even going to wear kid shorts when you squat down in the old Easy Chair."

"Is that what I'm going to do," he asked wryly, "for something I didn't do?"

"Save it," he was advised. "Save it for when you need it, and you're going to need it plenty."

All through the long weary day identification followed identification.

"Is this the man who bought a pack of cigarettes from you, and handed you in payment a dollar bill with the print of a bloody thumb on one side and the print of a bloody forefinger on the other?"

"That's him. I thought it was an advertising gag at first, the prints were both so clear. Like for one of them horror movies, where they stencil bloody footprints on the sidewalk in front of the theater, to pull the customers inside. I couldn't help looking at him while he was pocketing his change. I didn't call him on it because I could tell the bill wasn't queer, and he acted so natural, so nonchalant. I even saw him sitting out there smoking for a while afterwards. Yes sir, that's him all right!"

"I don't deny it."

"Is this the man who bought a can of Number Two russet-brown paint from you? *And* gloss. *And* brushes. *And* a folding stepladder."

"That's him."

"I don't deny it."

"Is this the man who bought a pair of overalls from you? And a pair of work gloves?"

"That's him."

"I don't deny it."

Room cleared of identifying witnesses.

"Then you took the materials you've just confessed you bought and went to work on the living room at One Eighty-two."

"That I don't admit."

"You deny you repainted that room? Why, it's the identical shade and grade of paint you bought from this paint store!"

"I didn't say I denied it. What I said was, I don't admit it."

"What does that mean?"

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"Prove I painted there. Prove I didn't paint somewhere else."

They knew they couldn't. So did he.

"Show us where you painted somewhere else, then."

"No, sir. No, *sir*. That's up to you, not up to me. I didn't say I painted somewhere else. I didn't say I didn't pour it down a sewer. I didn't say I didn't give it away as a present to a friend of mine. I didn't say I didn't leave it standing around some place for a minute and someone stole it from me."

The two detectives turned their backs on him for a minute. One smote himself on the top of the head and murmured to his companion, "Oh, this man! He's got a pretzel for a tongue."

The plastic garment bags and their hideous contents were finally located. Perhaps all the way across the country in some siding or railroad yard in Duluth or Kansas City or Abilene. They didn't tell him that outright, in so many words, or exactly where, but he could sense it by the subtle turn their questioning took.

They had their *corpus delicti* now, but they still couldn't pin it on him. What was holding them up, what was blocking them, he realized with grim satisfaction, was that they couldn't unearth a single witness who could place him at or near the freight yard he'd driven to that night—or at any other freight yard anywhere else on any other night. The car itself, after exhaustive tests and examinations, must have turned out pasteurizedly pure, antibiotically bloodless. He'd seen to that. And the garment bags had been her own to begin with.

There was nothing to trace him by.

Even the Samurai sword—which he had had the audacity to send right along with her, encased in a pair of her nylon stockings—was worthless to them. It had belonged to her, and even if it hadn't, there was no way of checking on such a thing—as there would have been in the case of a firearm. Being a war souvenir, it was nonregisterable.

Finally, there was the total lack of an alibi. Instead of counting against him, it seemed to have intensified the deadlock. From the very beginning he had offered none, laid claim to none, therefore gave them none to break down. He'd simply said he'd gone home and stayed there, and admitted from the start he couldn't prove it. But then they couldn't prove he'd been out to the bungalow either. Result: each cancelled the other out. Stand-off. Stalemate.

As if to show that they had reached a point of desperation, they finally had recourse, during several of the periods of interrogation, to stronger measures. Not violence: no blows were struck, nothing was done that might leave a mark on him afterward. Nor were any threats or promises

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made. It was a sort of tacit coercion, one might say. He understood it, they understood it, he understood they did, and they understood he did.

Unsuspectingly he accepted some punishingly salty food they sent out for and gave to him. Pickled or smoked herring. But no water.

A fire was made in the boiler room and the radiator in one of the basement detention rooms was turned on full blast, even though it was an oppressively hot turn-of-spring-into-summer day. Still no water.

As though this weren't enough, an electric heater was plugged into an outlet and aimed at his straight-backed chair. He was seated in it and compelled to keep two or three heavy blankets bundled around him. In no time, the floor around his feet had darkened with the slow seep of his perspiration. But still no water.

Then a tantalizingly frosted glass pitcher, brimming with crystal-clear water and studded with alluring ice cubes, was brought in and set down on a table just within arm's reach.

But each time he reached for it, he was asked a question. And while waiting for the answer, the nearest detective would, absently, draw the pitcher away—just beyond his reach—as if not being aware of what he was doing, the way a man doodles with a pencil or fiddles with a paperweight while talking to someone. When he asked openly for a drink, he was told (for the record): "Help yourself. It's right there in front of you. That's what it's here for." They were very meticulous about it. Nothing could be proved afterward.

He didn't get a drink of water. But they didn't get the answers they wanted either. Another stalemate.

They rang in a couple of ingenious variations after that, once with cigarettes, another time by a refusal of the comfort facilities of the building. With even less result, since neither impulse was as strong as thirst.

"All we need is one drop of blood," the detective kept warning him. "One drop of blood."

"You won't get it out of me."

"We have identified the remains, to show there *was* a crime—somewhere. We've found traces of blood on articles handled by you—like the dollar bill you gave the storekeeper—to show, presumably, that you were involved in some crime—somewhere. We've placed *you* in the vicinity of the bungalow: metal bits from the overalls and remains of the paint cans and brush handles in the ashes of the fire. Now all we've got to do is place the *crime itself* there. And that will close the circuit.

"One drop of blood will do it. One single drop of blood."

"It seems a shame that such a modest requirement can't be met," was his ironic comment.

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And then suddenly, when least expected, he was released.

Whether there was some legal technicality involved and they were afraid of losing him altogether in the long run if they charged him too quickly; whether it was just a temporary expedient so that they could watch him all the closer—anyway, release.

One of the detectives came in, stood looking at him.

"Good morning," he said finally to the detective, sardonically, to break the optical deadlock.

"I suppose you'd like to get out of here."

"There are places I've liked better."

The detective jerked his head. "You can go. That's all for now. Sign a receipt and the property clerk will return your valuables."

He didn't stir. "Not if there are any strings attached to it."

"What do you want, an apology or something?"

"No, I just want to know where I stand. Am I in or am I out—or what."

"You were never actually under arrest, so what're you beefing about?"

"Well, if I wasn't, there sure has been something hampering my freedom. Maybe my shoelaces were tied together."

"Just hold yourself available in case you're needed. Don't leave town."

He finally walked out behind the detective, throwing an empty cigarette pack on the floor. "Was any of this in the newspapers?"

"I don't keep a scrapbook. I wouldn't know," said the detective.

He picked one up, and it was, had been, and was going to be.

The first thing he did was to phone Allie. She wouldn't come to the phone—or they wouldn't let her. She was ill in bed, they said. That much he didn't disbelieve, nor wonder at. There was also a coldness, an iciness: he'd hurt these people badly.

He hung up. He tried again later. And then again. And still again. He wouldn't give up. His whole happiness was at stake now.

Finally he went back to his own apartment. There was nothing left for him to do. It was already well after midnight by this time. The phone was ringing as he keyed the door open. It sounded as if it had been ringing for some time and was about to die out. He grabbed at it.

"Darling," Allie said in a pathetically weak voice, "I'm calling you from the phone next to my bed. They don't know I'm doing it, or they—"

"You don't believe what you've been reading about me?"

"Not if you tell me not to."

"It was just a routine questioning. I used to know the girl a long time ago, and they grabbed at every straw that came their way."

"We'll have to change everything—go off quietly by ourselves. But I don't care."

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"I've got to see you. Shall I come up there?"

"No," she said fearfully. "Not yet. You'd better wait a while first. Give them a little more time."

"But then how am I going to—?"

"I'll dress and come out and meet you somewhere."

"Can you make it?"

"I'm getting better every minute. Just hearing your voice, hearing you say that it was not true—that's better than all their tranquilizers."

"There's a quiet little cocktail lounge called 'For Lovers Only.' Not noisy, not jammed. The end booth."

Her voice was getting stronger. "We were there once, remember?"

"Wear the same dress you did that night."

It was on all over again. "Hurry. I'm waiting for your hello-kiss."

He pulled his shirt off so exuberantly that he split the sleeve halfway down. He didn't care. He shook the shave-cream bomb until it nearly exploded in his hand. He went back to the phone and called a florist.

"I want an orchid sent somewhere—end booth—she'll be wearing pale yellow. I didn't ask you that, but what does come after the fifteen-dollar one? Then make it two fifteen-dollar ones. And on the card you just say this—'From a fellow to his girl'."

And because he was young and in love—completely, sincerely in love, even though he'd killed someone who had once loved him the same way—he started, in his high spirits, in his release from long-sustained tension, to do a mimic Indian war dance, prancing around the room, now reared up high, now bent down low, drumming his hand against his mouth. "O-wah-o-wah!"

I beat it! he told himself, I've got it made. Just take it easy from here in, just talk with a small mouth—and I'm the one in a thousand who beat it!

Then someone knocked quietly on his door.

Less than an hour after going to bed, one of the detectives stirred and finally sat up again.

His wife heard him groping for his shoes to put them back on. "What's the matter?" she asked sleepily. "You want a drink of water?"

"No," he said. "I want a drop of blood."

"If you couldn't find a drop of blood in the daytime, how are you going to find it at night?"

He didn't answer; he just went ahead pulling his pants on.

"Oh, God," the poor woman moaned, "why did I ever marry a detective?"

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"Oh, God," he groaned back from the direction of the door, "what makes you think you have?"

"O-wah-o-wah!"

Someone knocked quietly on his door.

He went over to it, and it was one of them again.

He looked at the intruder ruefully—confidently but ruefully. "What, again?" he sighed.

"This time it's for real."

"What was it all the other times, a rehearsal without costumes?"

"Hard to convince, aren't you? All right, I'll make it official," the detective said obligingly. "You're under arrest for the murder of Corinne Matthews. Anything-you-say-may-be-held-against-you-kindly-come-with-me."

"You did that like a professional," he smirked, still confident.

The detective had brought a car with him. They got in it.

"This is going to blow right up in your face. You know that, don't you? I'll sue for false arrest—I'll sue the city for a million."

"All right, I'll show you."

They drove to the bungalow that had been Corinne Matthews', and parked. They got out and went in together. They had to go through the doorway on the bias. The detective had him on handcuffs now—he wasn't taking any chances.

The detective left it dark. He took out his pocket-flash, and made a big dazzling cartwheel of light by holding it nozzle-close against one section of the wall.

"Take a good look," he said.

"Why don't you put the lights on?"

"Take a good look this way first."

Just a newly painted, spotless wall, and at one side the light switch, tripped to OFF.

"Now look at it this way."

He killed the pocket-light, snapped up the wall switch, and the room lit up. Still just a newly painted, spotless wall, and at one side the light switch, reversed now to ON.

And on it a small blob of blood.

"That's what I needed. And look, that's what I got."

The accused sat down, the accuser at the other end of the handcuffs, standing, his arm at elbow height.

"How can a guy win?" the murderer whispered.

"You killed her at night, when the lights were on, when the switch was

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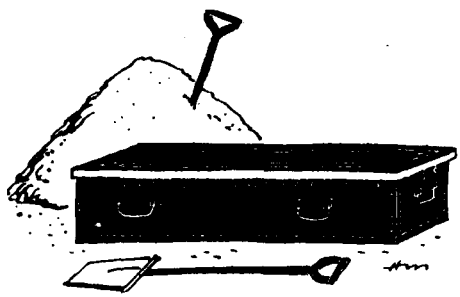
up like this, showing ON. You came back and painted in the daylight hours, when the lights were not on, when the switch was down, showing OFF. We cased this room a hundred times, for a hundred hours—*but always in the daytime too,* when the lights were not on, when the switch was down, showing OFF. And on the part of the switch *that never showed in the daytime,* the part marked ON, the way it is now, there was one drop of blood that we never found—until tonight."

The murderer was quiet for a minute, then he said the final words—no good to hold them back any more. "Sure," he said, "it was like that. That's what it was like."

His head went over, and a great huff of hot breath came surging out of him, rippling down his necktie, like the vital force, the will to resist, emptying itself.

The end of another story.

The end of another life.



NEXT MONTH . . .

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THE DEPARTMENT OF PATTERNS

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

by VICTOR CANNING

THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE DEpartment of Patterns is in a rather ramshackle old house on the Quai d'Orsay. The permanent staff is little more than a dozen, split among the four subdepartments which concern themselves with civil, military, criminal, and international affairs. Chief of the whole department is Monsieur Alphonse Grand-Papa Grand.

Papa Grand has an attic room to himself with a small window that looks out over the Seine. You only go to Papa Grand when you are onto something which looks like the beginning of a good pattern. The Department doesn't come directly under any Ministry but it works closely with them all and its job is to take up the loose ends and pursue the faint trails which the police and other authorities have had to shelve because of insufficient evidence and the pressure of day-to-day business.

There are a lot of files marked Unsolved in the police archives. The Department of Patterns has time—all the time in the world—to spend on small things that surprisingly and quite often turn out to be big things in the making. We just work away at random and then, every now and then, a lot of little things add up to a pattern.

Take a case in point. I had been seconded from the Criminal Jurisdiction for a two-year tour with the Department. Each year six or eight young men from various government departments get this honor—and it is an honor.

Well, I'd been put on escaped prisoners. Every year in France and in its dependencies men escaped from prison and penal settlements, and quite a few are never heard of again—more than you would imagine.

For two days I'd been going through lists of men who had escaped over the last three years and then suddenly something in one of the lists rang a faint bell in my memory. In the Department of Patterns when a bell rings, no matter how faintly, you pay attention to it.

Three days later I felt that I had enough material to take to Papa Grand. He was sitting, half turned away from his desk, with his feet up on the window sill. He was a big, solid-looking man, over sixty, with a fresh Norman complexion, white-haired, and with bright blue eyes that always had a little crinkle

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of smile around them—until you made a mistake. He always wore a high, stiff, old-fashioned collar.

He looked at me without saying anything for a moment and then slowly fished out his snuff box and took two pinches. The middle finger was missing from his right hand and the skin on the back of his hand was badly scarred—though how it had happened no one knew.

Then he said pleasantly, "Well, Belain, are you missing the excitements of your old department?"

"No, *patron*. It is a pleasure to eat at regular hours."

I took the file from under my arm and put it on his desk.

"Three years ago, *patron,* two men escaped from a penal settlement outside Conakry in the French Guinea. They have never been heard of since. One was Marcel Vannes, aged forty, and the other Francois Delapide, forty-two. They were both serving sentences for a murder committed in Guinea. They broke into a bank and killed the watchman when they were disturbed. They were old friends from Paris. And in the details of their descriptions it says that they were both tattooed on the chest. Marcel Vannes had the head and shoulders of a musketeer with the word Athos under it, and Francois Delapide a musketeer's head marked Porthos. It was this that made me remember an incident I came upon while doing some work on suicides when I first came to this Department."

"Which was?"

"That two years ago the body of a man was pulled out of the river Gardon near Remoulins. His face had been mutilated by rocks and boulders in the stream and he was never identified. But on his chest was a tattoo of a musketeer with the word Aramis under it. There's a police photograph of it in the file."

I watched as Papa Grand took out the photograph and then reached into a drawer for a magnifying glass. He bent over the photograph, studying it closely. Then without looking at me, he said, "Age?"

"About forty, according to the police doctor."

"I see. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. The Three Musketeers. You think there was a connection between Aramis and the others?"

"There could have been, *patron*. Three close friends, say. One day they all decide to get tattooed—maybe when they were much younger. Also—"

Papa Grand's head came up and he was smiling. "Belain, I like the way you say *also*. You do not know it, but you say it in exactly the same way as all the young men who come to work here. I am so used to it. That *also* means you have saved the titbit until last."

"Yes, *patron*. Nearly a year ago—this, too, I remembered from the

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suicide research I was doing—an elderly man was taken from the Rhone near Avignon. His name was Otto Raventhal. He was staying in Avignon on holiday without his wife. She testified that he had many gambling debts and it was assumed that he had committed suicide. For thirty years he had run a small tattooing *salon,* if that is the word, here in Paris. It was the tattoo element which intrigued me."

"And me, Belain. Aramis is dead. Athos and Porthos have disappeared. And a tattooist is dead. Aramis comes out of the river near Remoulins, and the tattooist out of the Rhone not so far away at Avignon, but a year later. Maybe someone in that district dislikes tattoos? What have you done?"

"Nothing, *patron,* except to check that Madame Raventhal still runs the tattooing business in Paris."

"You should have a talk with her." He handed me back the file. "The Aramis tattoo was certainly done by Otto Raventhal."

"You are sure, *patron?"* I showed my surprise.

"Yes, Belain, I am sure. Men of art are always proud of their work." He gave me his twinkling blue-eyed smile. "If you look at the design through a magnifying glass you will see that he has worked his initials, O.R., into the embroidery of Aramis' collar."

"I am sorry, *patron."* It was a mark against me.

"Never mind, Belain. Go and see the widow. Maybe you will get a trip to the south, far away from this Paris weather."

So I went to see Madame Raventhal. She owned a small house in a shabby side-street quite close to the Gare du Nord. The tattooing *salon* was on the ground floor.

There was an assistant in the *salon,* a man of nearly fifty I guessed, in an apron and shirt sleeves and with carpet slippers on his feet. His shoulders were bent and to make a long, lugubrious face more sad he wore a drooping pair of black mustaches like an unkempt Chinese mandarin's. He said he was Madame's assistant, and went away to fetch her.

I waited, studying the various tattoo designs pinned on the walls. There were naked women of all shapes, sizes, and nationalities, sailing ships, dragons, hearts and crosses, daggers and swords, and a mixture of regimental crests from half a dozen armies; but there were no musketeers.

Madame Raventhal came back by herself. She was a tall, gaunt, broomstick creature of about sixty, sniffing with a cold and not at all friendly. I explained that I was from the police—all the department staff carry police credentials—and that we were trying to establish the identity of a man pulled out of the Gardon two years before. Since he had been tattooed on the chest we

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were checking with all the tattooists in France.

"It was a tattoo of Aramis—one of The Three Musketeers, madame. Have you or your husband ever obliged anyone with such a design."

"Certainly not me, monsieur. I do not do tattoo work. Since my husband's death it has been carried on by an assistant I employ, and I am sure he has not done one. We keep a record of all our work and I see the record every day."

"You keep records? Did your husband also keep records?"

"Yes, monsieur, always."

"Then perhaps I may be allowed to inspect them?"

"They go back many years."

"The dead man was about forty. The tattoo could have been done as long as twenty years ago."

She took me into a small office behind the *salon* and produced a stack of dusty daybooks. I sat down to go through them. It was a tedious job and Madame Raventhal kept popping in to keep an eye on me. Long, tedious jobs are part of the Department's work, and at the end of four hours I found what I wanted.

For a day in June, fifteen years before, there was this entry: *One each of Three Musketeers, Aramis, Porthos, and Athos. Quite one of my best pieces of work. Marcel and two of his friends, Jean Autey and Francois Delapide.* There followed a note of the price paid.

I asked Madame Raventhal if her husband had ever had a friend named Marcel Vannes. "No, monsieur. The name means nothing to me."

I thanked her, and the assistant showed me out. At the door he sidled up to me and said, "Police? What's the old girl been up to? Always thought it was funny about her husband. Not like him. Couldn't stand water at any price."

I said, "You knew him?"

"Sure—he taught me the business. I joined him not long before he died. What you here for anyway?"

"Just a routine inquiry. *Bon jour, monsieur.*"

After that it was a question of digging for facts. I sent a cable to French Guinea asking for a check of the customs control records—to find out if a Jean Autey had ever visited the former colony. I also informed the police of the Department of Gard that the man pulled out of the river near Remoulins had been a Jean Autey, and asked them to try and trace anyone of that name ever living or staying in the area.

I also put his name into our stewpot—that is what we call it. Managing the stewpot is the first job you ever get in the Department of Patterns. A name is given to you and then you spend hours and days and weeks going through every conceivable kind of record from all the Ministries—Justice, Foreign Af-

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fairs, Interior, Armed Forces, War Veterans, Construction, Posts and Telegraphs—the whole boiling, and there are nearly twenty of them—hoping that something will turn up.

Two out of every five people coming into the Department for training never survive the stewpot. Some, though I cannot vouch for this, are said to have gone mad. I can believe it. But the system works. And it worked this time.

Nearly two weeks later I asked to see Papa Grand. When I went in, I was surprised to find him sitting back in his chair solemnly regarding a tortoise, about the size of a small dinner plate, which was apparently taking a stroll around his desk.

"Ha, Belain," he greeted me affably, "let me introduce you to my friend *Slow But Sure*. You know how many of these are imported into France each year from Africa? No, of course not. But a great many. Does he look like an ordinary tortoise to you?"

"He seems so, *patron*."

"But he is not." He reached forward and tapped the animal's shell. "On the top of his real shell, Belain, a false shell has been skillfully glued and the empty space between the two shells holds nearly four ounces of anything you like to put in it. In this case, drugs. The race is not to the swift. Now, how are the Three Musketeers coming along?"

"I've made some progress, *patron*."

I began to give him all my facts. The police at Remoulins hadn't been able to trace any Jean Autey. But from French Guinea I had been informed that Jean Autey had arrived there nearly eight years ago and had left a year later. He had arrived on the same boat as the other two musketeers, Vannes and Delapide, and he had left six months before they were imprisoned.

But the best bit of news had come out of the stewpot. A Jean Autey had changed his name by legal process to that of Leon Vaillard four years ago and his address was given as Chateau Le Pouzin, Remoulins. The house was still registered in the Commune records under that name.

Papa Grand listened to all this without interruption. Then when I had finished, he took up the tortoise and leaned back in his chair nursing it.

"So, Belain, what picture do we get?"

"Probably, *patron*, these three men were all friends. Fifteen years ago they all get tattooed. Seven years later they all go to French Guinea—to do what, I do not know. But a year later Jean Autey leaves alone. Shortly after, the other two rob a bank, are caught, and go to prison. Back in France, a year before the men escape from prison, Autey changes his name.

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Possibly he fears they will escape and look for him. So he covers his trail. Then they do escape. And not long afterwards Aramis-Jean Autey-Leon Vaillard is pulled out of a river, drowned. Was this revenge for something, *patron?*"

Papa Grand shrugged eloquently. Then he put the tortoise back on the desk and picked up a sheet of paper.

"You have not seen today's police bulletin, Belain? No. Well there is an item of interest in it. This morning a man was found by the roadside near St. Denis. The victim, it is thought, of a hit-and-run motorist, his face was badly damaged, and he had no identification papers. But on his chest he had a tattoo of a musketeer with the word Athos under it. I have asked for a photograph of the tattoo and the police are sending it up. So, Belain, Aramis is dead, so is Athos. But where is Porthos?"

"I think, *patron,* he might be at the Chateau Le Pouzin."

"So do I, Belain. You had better take a trip to the south. And do not do too much on your own. It is always a temptation. The moment you have enough information for the police to act, go to them. I will let them know you are leaving for Remoulins." He tapped his fingers together. "Three swashbuckling friends who go to French Guinea. What could they be going for, Belain? Let your imagination soar . . . One comes back, changes his name, and lives in a chateau. Think, Belain. Life is larger than fiction, but the patterns are always similar."

"No, *patron,* I do not know."

"Then walk down the Rue de Rivoli and look in the jewelers' shops. Diamonds, Belain. There are diamonds in Guinea, and there is a lot of illicit digging. You would like a little wager on this?"

I smiled. "Not with you, *patron.*"

"A pity."

The next day I motored down to Remoulins, reaching it just before dark. In one of the local cafés I learned that the Chateau Le Pouzin was about three kilometres from Remoulins, standing on a rocky bluff overlooking the river Gardon.

It was dark when I arrived at the Chateau after sweeping through wrought-iron gateways and up a stretch of dusty drive. I got an impression of slate-tiled turrets and gables, and the whole building was surrounded by tall pine trees. There were no lights showing from the chateau.

I rang the bell and waited. I had to ring twice more before a light went on in the hall and the door opened.

Against the light I made out a woman in evening dress, tall, willowy, and with blonde hair piled in a high coiffure. A trace of expensive perfume drifted toward me.

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I said, "May I speak to Monsieur Vaillard?"

I could not see her face clearly. "Monsieur Vaillard is away. I am Madame Vaillard."

"Then may I talk to you, madame?" Seeing her hesitation, I went on, "I am from the police, madame. Paris. We wish to make a few inquiries." I pulled out my pass. She took it and half turned to the light to examine it. I knew from her manner that she did not want to let me in. But there was nothing else she could do.

I was led down the hall and shown into a small sitting room. I saw her clearly then as she sat down on a settee and motioned me to a chair. She was about forty, still beautiful—the kind of woman you would stare at in a crowd.

I said, "Where is your husband, madame?"

There was a moment's hesitation and then she said, "He is in South America, I believe. He has been away for two years."

"You receive letters from him?"

"No, monsieur."

"Isn't that unusual?"

She smiled. "No, monsieur. We are not exactly on good terms with one another. Also, I will be frank with you, I am not really his wife. He is an odd man. He goes away, sometimes for a year, two years, and then comes back. Sometimes we are reconciled and sometimes not. But I stay here and the arrangement suits us both."

"You live here alone?"

"With my brother. He is changing for dinner at the moment."

I stood up. "I'm sorry to tell you, madame, that Monsieur Vaillard was drowned in the Gardon two years ago. He has only recently been identified and—"

But I got no further. At this moment there was the crash of a shot being fired somewhere in the upper rooms of the Chateau. I turned to the door but Madame Vaillard was there before me, flinging it open and running across the hall to the stairs. I followed her, taking out my automatic.

On the top floor a door was half open, a light streaming from it. I overtook her at the door and went in ahead of her. It was a bedroom and across the room was another open door giving me a glimpse of a bathroom. Between the bed and the bathroom door a man, naked except for a pair of silk drawers and a dressing gown, lay on the floor; one arm was outflung, with a baby Browning resting in the palm of the hand.

He was dead—a neat bullet hole drilled through the side of his right temple.

As I bent over him I knew at once who he was. He had just taken a bath and the dressing gown had opened over his naked chest. On it a musketeer was tattooed, with the word Porthos under it.

I stood up and turned to Madame Vaillard. She was staring

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down at the body, breathing heavily, and there was no doubt about her shock and distress. I took her arm, led her to a chair, then got a glass of water for her.

When she had drunk some of it, I said, "I think, madame, the time has come for you to talk. Your brother, as you call him, has committed suicide. I want to know all about Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. All of them are now dead—yes, Athos quite recently in Paris, near St. Denis."

I got it from her slowly but truthfully. The three men had gone to Guinea and had engaged in illicit diamond digging. She had met them in some Guinean night haunt where she had been a singer. The men had made a big strike, but Aramis had double-crossed the other two. He had gone off with nearly £300,000 of stones—and he had taken her with him, and soon changed his name.

Meanwhile the other two, needing money to go after him, had robbed a bank and landed in prison. They had escaped soon afterward but had quarreled and separated.

Porthos traced Aramis first, killed him, and threw his body into the river, faking a drowning. Madame Vaillard promptly switched musketeers, now attaching herself to Porthos. They had lived happily for some time until Otto Raventhal had turned up at the Chateau.

Raventhal had come from Athos, who had kept track of Porthos, and he told him that he would be exposed as an escaped prisoner unless Athos' share of the diamonds was handed over. Porthos had dealt with Otto Raventhal in the same way as he had dealt with Aramis—as a warning to Athos to keep clear of him.

"And the diamonds?" I asked her.

"Only about a third of them were sold. The rest of them are in a safe in the library. He—" she looked toward the dead man, "has the key. But why should he commit suicide?"

"He didn't, madame!"

A man's voice came from the bedroom door behind me and I whirled round, but too late. Something crashed down on my head and I went out into complete darkness . . .

I came to slowly and realized that I was being carried between two people. My hands and ankles were bound. My head ached and throbbed. For a while all I knew was that it was dark and that we were out in the open, moving through bushes and trees over rough ground. I caught a whiff of perfume and knew that Madame Vaillard had me by the feet, but a man's hands were round my shoulders and under my arms.

Occasionally the woman flashed a torch to pick out the path. I gave

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no sign that I had regained consciousness. They carried me, slowly and laboriously, dumping me for a rest now and then, but it was too dark for me to make out the details of the man. At one rest Madame Vaillard said quietly, "And what happens after this?"

"You go your way, I go mine. I need no partner. You can have one-quarter of the stones. Generous, eh?"

"He is from the police, you know."

"I don't care who he is. He goes over the Pont du Gard. We free his hands and feet and give him a hundred and sixty-foot drop into the river. Who cares?"

At that I nearly gave myself away. The Pont du Gard, of course!—the Chateau must be quite close to it. It was the old Roman aquaduct over the Gardon which had once taken water to Nimes, soaring high over the river, its great span and towering arches a famous tourist sight. You could walk across it in the water tunnel or over the top of the tunnel on the wide stone slabs—if you had a good head for heights.

A few minutes later and they had taken me down the slight cliff slope to the entrance of the aquaduct. There was only one hope for me, only one move which could save me from the deadly drop into the boulder-strewn river. I must wait for the moment when they released my hands and feet.

They hoisted me on to the first of the great slabs that roofed the aquaduct and I could see nothing below me but a great blackness.

As I lay there the man said, "All right. We'll take his cords off here and then drag him to the middle. But we'll take no chances. He's been out some time—he might come round when he hits the water. I'll crack his head again so that he'll never come round. Look the other way if you're squeamish."

The man laughed gently as he bent down toward me and I saw his hand rise over me with something in it. At that moment, I rolled, twisting over toward him and crashing my body against his feet. But he only laughed and his hand grabbed my throat, steadying me.

"Foxing, eh?" He laughed again. Then as the laugh died, the blackness of the night about us was suddenly ablaze from four or five powerful police torches. A crowd of figures threw themselves on the man and Madame Vaillard. In the light I saw the man's face . . .

Later, back at the Chateau, Papa Grand brought me a brandy and my hand trembled as I took it. A police inspector from Remoulins was in the room with us.

Papa Grand smiled at me. "It was a near thing, Belain, very near. I told you that a good artist always signs his work. When I got the photograph of the Athos tattoo on

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the dead man from St. Denis—this was after you had left for Remoulins—I saw that it was not signed O.R. So the dead man from St. Denis was not the real Athos—the real Athos is the man who tried to kill you."

"I saw his face—the long, drooping mustaches—he is Madame Raventhal's assistant!"

"Yes, from her tattooing *salon*. We inspected the tattoo on his chest, just before he was taken away, and it is signed O.R.—the authentic signature. The real Athos had to hide out, so he went to ground by becoming Otto Raventhal's assistant, and learned the trade. When his first blackmailing attempt through Raventhal failed, he decided to really clean up matters.

"First—because he became pressed for time as soon as you turned up unexpectedly at the *salon* —he had to clear his record as an escaped prisoner. He found a drunk, drugged and tattooed him —but overlooked putting in the O.R. signature—and then faked his car death near St. Denis. Then he came here to kill Porthos. With Porthos out of the way, he knew he'd have no trouble with Madame Vaillard—she was already an accomplice to two murders.

"When I checked the *salon* and learned that the assistant had left, I came down here at once and went directly to the Remoulins police. We arrived at the aqueduct just in time to see Madame Vaillard's torch flickering in the distance."

"I never suspected him—the tattooing assistant!"

Papa Grand patted my shoulder. "Drink up, my young Belain—drink, should I say, to what was nearly the last drop?"

EDITORS' NOTE: This story fooled us completely—but in an unusual way. All through the story we excepted a certain development to happen—but it never did. All through the story we expected a fourth man to appear—but he never did.

Who was this fourth man? Well, we think of The Three Musketeers as three men, and strictly speaking, that is true. But in a truer sense aren't The Three Musketeers four men? Isn't D'Artagnan one of that immortal group of musketeers?

And so we expected the murderer to be a fourth man—an "invisible" man with a musketeer tattooed on his chest and the name D'Artagnan under the tattoo. Alas, we were fooled—but we must confess that we missed D'Artagnan . . .

The third tale of the Department of Patterns, *The Missing Tins of Chicken Breasts,* will appear in the near future.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**GORDON GASKILL**
TITLE:	***Murder East of Cairo***
TYPE:	Detective Novelette
DETECTIVES:	Les Harris and Hassan Bey
LOCALE:	Bahmaar, on the Persian Gulf
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*The Arabs called it "The Doorway to Gehenna." The Americans simply called it "Nowhere." Is was there, east of Suez, that "the desert let him die" . . .*

FOR the third time I yawned. And, for maybe the thousandth time, I wondered why all airplanes have to leave at the crack of dawn.

It had only one advantage: the wind wasn't up yet. Later in the day it would be whipping up a sandstorm on the patch of desert we called an airfield. But now the air was clear and still.

The Persian Gulf sparkled like a field of blue diamonds. Off in the town of Bahmaar the white minarets looked clean and lovely. From this distance even the mud walls of the Sheikh's sprawling palace seemed romantic.

I yawned again, and Anne Hillman laughed.

"I told you not to bother seeing me off," she said.

In her khaki work clothes she should have looked shapeless, but she didn't. Maybe it was the red ribbon in her blonde hair. Maybe it was because I knew what was under the work clothes, having spent many long and happy hours watching her at the beach, where she looked like anything in the world but a geologist.

I shook my head. "Why," I wondered out loud, "would any woman want to be a geologist? And if she has to be one, for some dark and guilty reason, why come to a forgotten country like Bahmaar, and—"

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"We would never have met if I hadn't," she pointed out.

"And," I went on, paying no attention, "if she does have to come here, why can't she stay in town and not got out in the desert with a bunch of wolves who haven't seen a white woman for months?"

The pilot sauntered out of the operations hut. "Hi, Les!" he said to me. To Anne he said, "Come on, baby, let's start flapping our wings."

We let the other passengers get on first, and then we walked out to the DC-3. I put Anne's bag aboard.

The pilot climbed on. "Don't worry, Les," he grinned. "We'll take good care of her. *Mighty* good care!" As he walked toward the cockpit, he howled a long howl.

"And don't forget!" I shouted to her. "Some wolves have wings, too!" She turned and laughed, just as they closed the door.

The DC-3 headed south for the heart of the big desert the Arabs call "The Doorway to Gehenna." The Americans call it simply "Nowhere." It's the worst desert in this part of the world, but that didn't stop the company—the American Bahmaar Oil Company—from exploring it for oil.

Somewhere, nearly 300 miles from here, was E-Camp—E for Exploration—where the boys were hunting oil. They drilled their own water, but everything else had to be trucked or flown in to them. Once a week, Sundays, a DC-3 flew a milk run down to them, taking men in and out, carrying mail, laundry, and light freight.

Which meant Anne couldn't get back for a week. She didn't have to go, in the first place; in fact, she had had to wangle the trip. She was an office geologist, and normally a man would have gone. No other woman had been down there yet, and she wanted to see what geology looked like in the desert, instead of in an office.

"And this is my last chance," she'd explained, when I'd hemmed and hawed. E-Camp was rushing up its work; they hoped to finish the job in the next three weeks, before the full summer heat and sandstorms made exploration impossible.

"You're getting too Arabic," she had laughed. "Maybe you'd be happier if I wore a veil."

I watched the plane out of sight. One of the guys came out of the operations hut and called, "Phone for you, Les! It's McLeod!"

"McLeod himself?" I asked. He was Number One, the head man for the company here. I picked up the hanging phone and said, "This is Les Harris."

"McLeod here!" he said, his voice rasping over the wire. "Has that plane gone yet?"

"Yes, sir, a few minutes ago."

He swore. "Well, get it back. E-Camp just called on the radio. They've got a man killed, and I want you to get down there."

"An Arab?" I asked.

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"No. An American—Jerry Cameron. He runs—ran—a magnetometer. You know him?"

"A little," I said. "How did it happen?"

"Murder," McLeod said. "He was stabbed. That's all I know. They found him this morning . . . Now, listen! The Sheikh is sending Hassan Bey with you—he'll be at the airfield by the time the plane gets back. You two get down there and find out what happened!"

"I'm no Sherlock Holmes," I pointed out.

"I know darned well you're not!" McLeod snapped. "But you're the nearest we've got to it, and Hassan Bey is the nearest the Arabs have got. So get going, and radio me when you've looked around." He hung up.

I turned to the operations chief. "McLeod says to call the plane back."

He switched on the transmitter and I looked at my watch. The plane had been gone about ten minutes, and ought to be back in another ten. I bummed some coffee and a chocolate bar, and sat down to wait. And to think.

Jerry Cameron. We'd been in the company tennis tournament together. I remembered he was tall, well built, good-looking, with short black hair, maybe 28 or 30. Mostly, though, I remembered the Fourth of July dance. He'd been on the prowl. The desert rats always were, on their one week's town leave after two months out in the blue.

So why shouldn't Jerry make a few passes at Anne? She was the prettiest girl in Bahmaar, and he had no way of knowing how it was with us. And when he found out, everything was all right. She was nice. He was nice. I was nice. All I had to say to him was, "Pal, we're prisoners of Section 32."

"Sorry," he had grinned, "and congratulations. You've got a swell cellmate." And he'd wandered away, looking for something else.

Section 32 was the company rule that says two ABOC employees can't marry until "family accommodations" are available. Housing was short, so this made for long engagements. Anne and I were biting our nails, waiting out the five months I still had to go.

I heard a faint snoring of motors and walked outside. There was a speck in the sky to the south. A sedan pulled up, and a dumpy little Arab got out, carrying a bag.

Most Arabs around here looked like tall, dignified hawks in their flowing robes and headdress. Hassan Bey was so short they made him look ridiculous. But he wasn't from these parts, and he wasn't ridiculous. He came from Palestine, where, during the British mandate, he'd learned excellent English and served with the Palestine police. Now he was the Sheikh of Bahmaar's liaison man with the oil company, on personnel problems.

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And we had them. The Americans didn't understand Arab taboos, and the Arabs were touchy as a boil. Sometimes it was just stupidity, as offering an Arab a ham sandwich. Sometimes it was malice, as making cracks about the Prophet's love life.

The company had a whole "relations" department to smooth out such things. That was my job. The company had sent me to school in America, then Oxford, then Cairo, trying to make an Arab expert out of me.

Hassan Bey was a godsend, and I worked closely with him. Although he was pure Arab, in Palestine he'd learned how the Western mind works. He was honest and smart; like most Arabs, he had a sense of humor.

"Allah karim!" he sighed. "God is merciful! It is a sad thing which has happened." We spoke a mixture of English and Arabic. Sometimes it was elaborate talk, sometimes the Anglo-American style he'd picked up. Now we were stately.

"May we be given strength," I replied, "to do what is right in the sight of God."

We watched the DC-3 touch down, and a jeep took us to it when it stopped rolling. We climbed aboard, and Anne asked, puzzled, "What in the world? Why did we come back?"

I told her.

"Poor Jerry!" she said softly. "Do they know who—?"

"No," I said. "We're going down to find out, if we can."

The pilot came back, and I explained again. He pursed his lips and whistled. "Cameron, huh?" He didn't look too upset.

Anne already knew Hassan Bey. On the flight down, the three of us put together what little we knew. I told about the Fourth of July dance. When I finished, Hassan Bey looked keenly at Anne and said, "And there was nothing more?"

She flushed. "Of course not! It was just one of those things. Nobody was the slightest bit mad."

Hassan Bey shook his head. "Oh, you infidels! If you keep such beautiful women without veils, nothing but trouble will come of it." He smiled at Anne. "Tell me, Miss Hillman, was this—this Cameron what you call in your language a man of the ladies?"

"A what?" Then she laughed. "Oh, a ladies' man! Yes, I'd say he was. He had good looks and good manners, and, well, a kind of something women would like."

"And something," he murmured, "that a man did *not* like!" He stared out the window at the sandy waste flowing under our wings. "In the Palestine police," he went on, "we used to say—find the eyes of a woman, or the shine of gold, or the fear of a coward."

"Even among the infidels is it so, O Hassan Bey!" I mocked. "But that's all I know about the 'eyes of a woman.' How about you, Anne?"

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She hesitated, considering, then shook her head.

"So we come to gold," Hassan Bey said. "For oil is sometimes called black gold, is it not? I am not quite clear as to the kind of work being done at this E-Camp."

We gave him a brief run-down on the concession agreement, much of which he already knew, of course. The company had oil rights for the whole Sheikhdom of Bahmaar, which was divided into four zones. That is, it had a sort of option on each zone. If it didn't take up the option by a certain date—different for each zone—the option would be lost.

We were already producing oil in Zones I and II and, of course, had taken up the two options. As for Zone III, we had explored it, found no signs of oil, and last year surrendered it back to the Sheikh. Now we were exploring Zone IV, the last. The deadline was near, which was why the company was rushing the job.

Hassan Bey asked, "And if you surrender Zone IV back to the Sheikh, he can then give it to some other company, if he wishes?"

Anne smiled. "Of course he could, if he could find anybody silly enough to pay for it. But once we say there's no oil there, and surrender it, nobody else would want it."

"Is there no chance of error?" he queried. "Was it not on the island of Bahrein where you Americans found oil after the English scientists said there was none?"

"Yes," she said, "but that was over twenty years ago. Now there are new methods, new instruments. We don't make mistakes like that any more. And the proof is that nobody's taken up Zone III, although we turned it back to the Sheikh a year ago. And you know, Hassan Bey, how many people would like to get in on the oil here."

He nodded. "Around a desert well," he quoted, "are many thirsty camels." He paused, then glanced at me. "You have heard, I suppose, the talk in the bazaars—that Zaradin will soon have his finger in our oil?"

"Zaradin!" I exclaimed. "Is he still nosing around?"

The papers always called Josef Zaradin the "mystery man of finance." Nobody knows where he was born, but somehow he had acquired a British passport and a fantastic amount of dollars, pounds, francs, lire, piasters, and what have you. Openly, he owned some steamship lines, banks, and factories. Secretly, it was rumored, he made money on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Anne laughed. "He can have Zone III right now, if he wants it—and a lot of good it'll do him, unless he owns a sandpaper factory somewhere."

Hassan Bey shrugged. "Perhaps the rumor means nothing. There is much empty wind in the bazaars.

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But one says that Mohammed al Nasr looks contented, and receives many letters and cablegrams from Zaradin."

Mohammed al Nasr was the richest merchant in Bahmaar and the one Americans knew best, because he owned, among other things, the big shop where most Americans bought their Bahmaar souvenirs. He was Zaradin's principal contact in Bahmaar.

"Even supposing it's true," I said, "do you think there's some connection with Cameron's death?"

"My friend," he replied. "it is too early yet to think. But in my time I have seen that where there is much oil, there is much money. And where there is much money, there is often much trouble."

Down in the desert I spotted a huddle of tents, and the plane banked sharply. We soon bounced onto a strip of desert outlined with crude oil.

A yellow company sedan with oversized sand tires was waiting, and beside it a tall, rangy figure in khaki work clothes. It was Jock Campbell, the boss of E-Camp. He was an odd and valuable combination: an old-timer in the oil business who had a college degree in oil geology. He knew not only all the latest theories and instruments, but he also knew how they worked in the jungles and deserts. He was the company's chief of field exploration. Last year McLeod, presenting Jock with a thirty-years-service pin (platinum and diamonds), had called him "the company's eyes and ears."

Anne and I, of course, knew Jock well. Normally, he was full of Texas bounce, but not today.

"I wish we had a better welcome for you on your first trip down," he said sadly. "Especially you, Miss Anne. Of all times for this to happen!"

I introduced Hassan Bey to Jock, and thought it was a good time to set things straight. Like a lot of Americans, Jock might have trouble remembering it was the Sheikh, not the company, who ran things in Bahmaar.

Now I told him, "Hassan Bey is the Sheikh's representative, Jock. He'll be in charge of the investigation."

I turned to Hassan Bey. "Jock is the company's Number One man in charge of exploration out here. They call him the King of the Desert." I caught myself and added quickly, "Next to the Sheikh, of course."

Hassan Bey smiled. "Excellent!" he said. "We shall probably need a king's help in this terrible affair."

Jock looked relieved to hear Hassan Bey's good English. "We'll do anything under the sun to help you," he promised. "We left the body exactly as it was found."

One look at E-Camp explained why the men went wild on their town leave. Except for a low ridge

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of sand dunes to the east, there was absolutely nothing but sand and pebbles as far as the eye could see.

Three big aluminum trailers formed the nucleus of the camp. Near it were some 15 or 20 small tents, arranged in rows, for the Americans, each of whom had his private tent. Several hundred yards away were other tents, for the Arab workers.

Jock drove us to the mess tent, a big, green affair near the trailers. "A little coffee wouldn't hurt," he explained.

In the mess tent was another American. He was tall and thin, burned black by the fierce desert sun. Like a lot of E-boys, he had let his beard grow. He looked about 25.

Jock introduced him. "This is Jim Loomis," he explained. "He found the body. Perhaps you can tell about it, Loomis."

Loomis looked uneasy. "Well," he said hesitantly, "you know we work in pairs, two men to a car. Jerry and I worked together. Everybody starts early out here, about six, since it gets so hot later in the day. This morning I had breakfast and waited for Jerry. Everybody else was gone, and still he didn't show. I went over to his tent, figuring he'd overslept. I took one look, and told Mr. Campbell. And that's all I know. I didn't touch a thing." He managed a half grin. "I've read plenty of murder stories. You're not supposed to touch anything."

The coffee tasted wonderful. We had two cups, and Jock said, standing up, "Now, if you'd like to see . . ." He turned tactfully to Anne: "Perhaps you'd like some breakfast while we—look around."

She didn't object.

The rest of us walked slowly to Cameron's tent, the last in its row. Two Arab soldiers stood guard over it. E-Camp had a small detachment of them to keep order among the Arabs. Jock Campbell lifted the tent flap and led us in.

Hassan Bey drew a long, sighing breath, and I was glad I'd had no breakfast.

Jerry Cameron wasn't good-looking now. He lay on his side, his face frozen forever into surprised pain. The bed was caked with hardened blood; the flies humming around it were somehow the last touch of horror.

The dagger hilt protruded from between his shoulder blades. It was made of some dark wood, wrapped with silver wire. I recognized it immediately, and little good it would do us. It was a typical dagger. Every Bedouin carried one; nearly every American had bought one for a souvenir.

Hassan Bey wrapped the hilt with his handkerchief, and held on to it.

"Bismillah al rahman al rahim!" he murmured. "In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful!"

I felt my spine chill. It is a phrase

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often on Arab lips, but I remembered the last time I had heard it. An Arab butcher had said it, as ritual demands, just before cutting the throat of a sheep.

Hassan Bey pulled. He had to pull hard before the wide, L-shaped blade finally came free. He stared at it for a long time, then he said, "No fingerprints are possible. The silver wire will show nothing."

"Footprints?" I suggested, and immediately felt foolish. The soft desert sand left no clear marks. Anyway, it had been trampled by everybody.

"There is no more use for the body," Hassan Bey said. "We need no doctor to tell us the cause of death. And suicide is not possible with the dagger where it was. It can be only murder."

The body was wrapped in canvas and taken to the plane, which took off for Bahmaar.

I watched the plane disappear into the sand haze. I remembered a Bedouin proverb: "If the desert lets you live, you belong to it." Cameron didn't belong any longer. The desert let him die . . .

The floor of the tent was nothing but sand. An Arab raked it over to cover the blood, and we began searching Cameron's few possessions.

Aside from the bed, the furniture consisted of a folding work table, a folding chair, and a foot locker. The table held some books, a portable typewriter, a pile of typewriter paper. There was something odd about the paper, and finally I realized what it was.

"Funny," I said. "Everything else has got a lot of sand dust on it, but there's hardly any on the paper."

The books were mostly about Arabs, and I'd read all of them myself. There were a few pocket-book novels, and a volume titled, *Modern Geophysics*. Hassan Bey squinted at it, puzzled.

"That's what these men do out here—geophysics," I explained. "They're called geophysicists."

He grimaced. "Surely," he said, "there is no such word in Arabic."

The foot locker had nothing special—some extra work clothes, a camera, binoculars, and that was all. In the clothes Cameron left hanging on a nail was nothing but half a pack of cigarettes, a lighter, a handkerchief. No money. There's no way to spend money in the desert.

We walked back to the mess tent. Anne looked up, questioningly, but I shook my head. "Nothing so far," I said.

Hassan Bey settled into a chair, accepted another cup of the American coffee which, like most Arabs, he didn't like, and said to Jock, "I suppose, Mr. Campbell, it is time to begin the classic procedure—to question all the Americans in your camp."

Jock half smiled. "Not right now, sir, I'm afraid. You see, there are no other Americans in camp now, ex-

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cept Loomis and me. By the time Loomis found the body, all the other men had gone into the desert to work. There are no radios in their cars, and it's impossible to call them back."

"When will they return?" Hassan Bey asked politely.

"About half of them today, about half sometime tomorrow," Jock replied. "The ones working near us come back every night. The ones working far away take food and sleeping kit and spend the night out."

"So, normally," Hassan Bey said, "you are left entirely alone in camp."

"Except for Joe Worth. He's the mechanic for the party and the camp mother and general factotum. Normally, he'd be here, but a truck broke down last night about twenty-five miles east of here, and Joe went out this morning to fix it and bring it in. He ought to be here about lunchtime."

Hassan Bey said, "Then we must accept the inevitable. Perhaps you and Mr. Loomis can tell us anything you know that may help."

"I'm not quite sure," Jock said, "what kind of thing you have in mind."

"Nor am I," confessed Hassan Bey. "But a man has been killed—murdered. Your party here is a small one—not more than twenty men."

"Nineteen Americans," Jock said, "but sixty or seventy Arabs."

"True," Hassan Bey acknowledged. "But let us take the Americans first. I suppose that in an isolated party of men tensions are bound to develop. Do you know of anything that may bear on this matter?"

Jock looked unhappily at Jim Loomis. "Well, you're bound to find out sooner or later," he said. "I can't believe it means anything, but the fact is that Cameron had a fist fight about three weeks ago."

We all looked at him. "Who was the other man?" I said.

"One of our surveyors. Maybe you know him, Les. Dusty Rhodes."

I did—vaguely—because he was a vague kind of man. Nondescript, quiet-looking, in his mid-forties, he had been with the company a long time. He didn't look like the kind of man to get into a fist fight with anybody.

"What was it about?" I asked.

Jock smiled faintly. "When I asked them the same thing, they said it was none of my business. You see, as the party chief and an older man, I don't keep as close to the men as I'd like." He turned to Loomis. "Perhaps you can tell more about it, Jim."

Loomis' eyes sparkled. He looked like a born male gossip. "We heard he said, "that it was about Dusty's wife in Bahmaar. You know, Joe Worth goes into town more than anybody else, and he always took letters to Dusty's wife. Well, one time Joe wasn't going in, but Jerry

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Cameron was. So Dusty asked him to take the letter. Well, Cameron sure took it! Later, some of the guys heard that Cameron was running around with her every time he got leave, while Dusty was stashed away out here. I guess Dusty heard about it himself, finally, and that caused the fight. That Rhodes woman, she's some babe!"

Anne glanced at me. Everybody, even I, knew about Viola Rhodes. In fact, it had come up in our "relations" department—she seemed to be having a romance with one of the Sheikh's sons, although we could never pin it down.

She was a good ten years younger than her husband. Restless and looking for excitement, she'd be exactly the type to get into trouble—a well dressed, well stacked brunette that you'd whistle at if her husband wasn't around. And for eight weeks out of nine he *wasn't* around.

"And there was no more trouble afterwards?" Hassan Bey asked.

"Not until—" Jock stopped. "None that I know of," he concluded.

"Until now," Hassan Bey said softly.

Jock played with his penknife. "I suppose it looks that way, at first glance," he said, "but I have trouble believing it. Nothing new could have come up. Neither of them had been back on leave since."

Loomis put in an oar. "Maybe I'm stickin' my neck out," he said, "but I just can't see Dusty using that knife. He wasn't that kind of man."

Hassan Bey stared at him thoughtfully. "Given the right reason, and the right moment," he said, "any man can be a murderer."

He went on speaking to Loomis. "Perhaps you can assist us, as you were a specially close friend of the dead man. Can you tell—?"

Unexpectedly, Loomis interrupted. "I wouldn't quite say that, mister. I worked with him, yes. But close friend—that's another matter. Fact is, I don't think he had any really close friends in camp—do you, Mr. Campbell?" Loomis sniggered. "Except Joe Worth—and Joe darn' near killed him once."

Jock flushed. "This is a poor time to joke, Loomis!" he said sharply.

"If you can explain—" Hassan Bey murmured.

"It was nothing," Jock said impatiently. "Worth and Cameron hunted together a lot, mostly for gazelle. One day Worth's gun went off accidentally, and narrowly missed Cameron. It was an accident, and nobody ever suggested it wasn't." He frowned at Loomis.

"I talked out of turn," Loomis said ruefully. "Sure, nobody in his right mind would think old Joe . . ." His voice trailed off.

"They were alone at the time?" Hassan Bey inquired.

"They had an Arab guide," Jock said. "He can confirm that it was an accident."

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Hassan Bey nodded and appeared to forget the shooting. He went on with Loomis: "You say he had no friends in camp, except Mr. Worth. Let us put it another way—did he have any enemies, except Mr. Rhodes?"

"Enemies?" Loomis' brow wrinkled. "No, that's too strong. It was just that he was different from the rest of us. For one thing, he was a college man." He glanced at Jock, remembering he was a college man, too, but Jock only smiled. "He was the quiet type—except with women. A good guy, I guess, but you can't buddy up much to an eager beaver. At night, Jerry'd stay in his tent, alone, reading, or working out his duplicate readings, using that book the company gives us and nobody else ever breaks open—"

Anne looked up sharply. Jock had a surprised look on his face. "Wait a minute," he said. "What was that about duplicate readings?"

Loomis seemed confused. "Why, didn't you know about that? He made carbon copies of his work sheets."

Anne frowned with concentration. "But why would he bother?" she asked.

Hassan Bey looked at me, puzzled, but I shrugged. It was Greek to me.

"Like I said," Loomis returned. "He kept a copy of his work sheets. He'd turn in the original and then, at night, he'd play around with his carbon copy. I asked him once, and he said it gave him good practice."

"Forgive me," Hassan Bey said apologetically, "but I understand nothing of this. What is this copy, and why is it so strange the dead man should have kept copies?" He turned to Anne.

She tried to make it simple. "Well you see, all the men use various kinds of instruments. Every day they take readings—hundreds, thousands of them. Every night, when they come back, they turn in their work sheets, with these readings on them, to the party chief—to Mr. Campbell here. He enters them on another sheet—the progress sheet—with certain corrections, and sends it to us in Bahmaar every week."

"And it is strange," Hassan Bey said, "for a man to make a copy of his own readings?"

"I'd say it was," she replied thoughtfully. "The readings wouldn't be any good—even for practice—without the daily corrections."

Jock nodded agreement. Hassan Bey and I looked at each other helplessly. I wondered what it was going to be like having a smart geologist for a wife.

Anne caught my look, and smiled, and I decided the geologist would make a fine wife, after all. "It's pretty complicated," she said. "Maybe you'd better take over, Jock." She knew, all right, but it was tactful to let Jock tell about his own operation.

Hassan Bey interposed. "Please,"

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he begged, with an apologetic smile, "can you make this very simple? I have no knowledge at all of this geo—geophy . . ." He gave up, and the laughter broke the tension.

"Fair enough," Jock said. "Let's follow it through step by step. A man—let's take Cameron—goes out into the desert with his instrument—in this case a magnetometer—and takes a lot of different readings at a lot of different places. He writes them all down on what we call a work sheet. Follow me?"

Hassan Bey nodded.

"But these readings," Jock continued, "don't mean anything at all until they're corrected according to a stationary instrument we keep in camp."

Hassan Bey looked dazed.

Jock said, "Here, I'll show you."

He led us to the outskirts of the camp. A white-painted wooden case stood on a post in the center of a space enclosed by a low, circular fence which was perhaps 100 feet in diameter.

"That's our base magnet," Jock explained. "It keeps an automatic record of the minute-by-minute changes in the magnetic lines in this part of the desert. And the readings Cameron brings in—brought in—from the desert don't amount to a tinker's dam unless they're corrected according to these minute-by-minute changes. Plus or minus, as the case may be."

Hassan Bey nodded slowly. "This base magnet of yours is carefully protected. Is it so valuable?"

Jock laughed. "No, the fence is to keep people and vehicles away from the magnet. It's so sensitive that even a penknife would throw it off, and thus the whole readings for all that day would be worthless."

"You are an excellent teacher." Hassan Bey smiled. "Now, can you tell me what happens to the readings that Cameron brought in."

Jock looked puzzled, but he nodded. "Of course. He would turn in his work sheet, with his own readings. Then my work begins. I correct each figure of his in accordance with the readings from the base magnet. The result I put down on the weekly progress sheet that goes to Bahmaar."

"And the automatic record this machine keeps every minute—Allah is great!—who has access to this, and what kind of thing is it?"

"It's a sort of tape," Jock explained. "And it's part of Joe's job—Joe Worth—to bring it in to me every night, when the men are back."

Hassan Bey rubbed his beard thoughtfully for a full minute. Then he said, "You say that Cameron's readings mean nothing—even for what he called his 'practicing'—unless they can be corrected according to this tape?"

"That is correct, sir," Jock agreed.

"Could Cameron have seen the tape, then?"

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Anne looked at me in excitement. I had a faint glimmering now of what Hassan Bey had under his headdress.

"No, indeed!" Jock was saying. "Nobody has it but me."

"And Mr. Worth," Hassan Bey added gently.

"What? Oh, for a few minutes, yes, just long enough to bring it to me." Jock couldn't restrain himself any more. "Are you saying, sir, that all this may have something to do with Cameron's death?" He was polite, but skeptical.

Hassan Bey went pure Arab. He shrugged. "There seem to be two mysteries here. Why Cameron was killed, and why he kept records which seem of no conceivable value to him or to anyone else. It is not impossible that the two mysteries are related, and that one key may open two locked doors." He wasn't finished yet. "One more thing, Mr. Campbell: when you have entered all the men's readings—with the corrections—on your weekly sheet, what do you do with them?"

Resigned, Jock said, "I keep them for a week, until I make sure my weekly sheet gets to Bahmaar safely. Then I burn them."

"Keeping no copies?"

Jock chuckled. "Sir, if we kept all the copies of all the work sheets and all the weekly sheets out here, they'd fill the desert. No, once my weekly sheet gets to Bahmaar, there's no need for me to keep any copies."

Anne and I walked side by side toward the mess tent, followed by the others.

"As a prospective husband, I hate to admit it," I said, "but this is a little over my head. What was Hassan Bey getting at?"

"I'm not sure," she said, "but he seems to think Cameron was trying to keep a duplicate record of how our exploration is going out here."

"Could Cameron have done it?" I asked. "Is it possible?"

"I don't see how," she said, "but let me think some more."

It was almost time for lunch. Jock showed us what his weekly sheet looked like, and what a work sheet looked like. He showed us the incinerator where they were burned—an empty oil drum punched with large holes.

He also showed us the duplicate of his own weekly progress sheet; the original had gone back to Bahmaar on the plane. During the week, while he was filling it out, he kept it in a locked drawer.

"Just to keep it from being mislaid," he explained. "Nobody would steal it, of course; it wouldn't be worth a dime to anybody." He said the drawer had only one key, and he had it.

Lunch was dismal. The food was good—cold cuts, lettuce salad, and cold milk from the huge refrigerators—but murder makes a poor sauce and the fiery midday heat was no help. Just as we had finished, Joe Worth returned.

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He was a tall, gaunt, friendly man, about fifty. He was covered with sand dust from his long drive in the desert. Without thinking, we ruined his appetite. We forgot he had left camp this morning before Cameron's body had been found, and of course knew nothing about it until we told him.

"Killed!" he gasped. "Jerry Cameron killed?"

He slumped down into a chair. I decided he really must have been a close friend of Cameron's. Certainly he seemed far more affected than anybody else so far.

Briefly as I could, sparing the worst details, I brought him up to date. Maybe it would have been kinder to give him time to pull himself together but, shaken as he was, he might tell us more.

First, there was the fist fight. "In a way," Worth said morosely, "that was my fault. I used to take Dusty's letters to his wife. If I'd taken them that time, instead of Jerry, then he'd never have met her and—" He stopped talking suddenly. Then, "She was—she was quite a woman," he said, swallowing.

"We have heard," Hassan Bey said, "that you go into Bahmaar much more frequently than the other men."

"That's right," Worth said abstractedly. "I have to order machine parts, and food, and stuff."

He flushed when Hassan Bey brought up the hunting accident.

"Who told you about that?" Worth demanded, his eyes glinting. Then he shrugged. "Never mind. I guess you were bound to hear about it. Well, here's how it was, and I'm ashamed of myself. I've hunted all my life, and nothing like this ever happened before.

"You see," he went on, "out here they hunt gazelle with cars. A gazelle is fast all right, but a car can always run it down in the open. You can shoot it with anything—a shotgun, rifle, even a pistol—and sometimes it gets so tired you can get out and pick it up."

"Fine sport," I murmured.

"I know," he said apologetically, "but that's the way they do it out here. Jerry and I went out one day with an Arab guide. Jerry was driving, with the guide next to him. I was in the back seat with my gun. We started chasing a gazelle. It was real rough ground. I had the safety off, ready to shoot, when Jerry drove us over a big hummock of dead camel thorn. The car jumped and the gun went off somehow. Thank heavens, it didn't hit anybody, but it went right by Jerry's ear. You can ask the Arab how it was."

Hassan Bey nodded thoughtfully. "We have also heard, Mr. Worth, that you were his best friend here."

"I guess that's right," Joe Worth said slowly. "Funny, too, him being a college man and me not, and me old enough to be his father. But he was different. He read a lot—good books, I mean. He took an interest in the Arabs and the way they live.

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He got to talk their lingo pretty good, even if he was here only a little over a year. He used to go visit 'em, out here and in Bahmaar, too. In fact—" He stopped short, and looked confused.

"Yes?" Hassan Bey prompted gently.

"Well," Worth went on reluctantly, "he asked me not to tell anybody about it. They were already kidding him so much about Viola Rhodes. Now he's dead, though, I guess it's all right to tell."

"Tell what?" I said impatiently.

"How he got into trouble over an Arab girl," Worth said. "He was quite a ladies' man, and—"

Hassan Bey's eyes widened, and Anne looked at me. In this part of the world, the Arabs are almost insane about their *'ardh,* which means family honor. If a man thinks his wife or daughter is playing around, he wouldn't be considered an honorable man if he didn't cut off her head. And for such an honor-killing there is no punishment at all. While as for the man—especially an infidel foreigner—who led the woman astray . . .

Hassan Bey asked softly, "Do you mean, Mr. Worth, that Cameron was—how shall we say?—involved with an Arab girl in Bahmaar?"

"Nope," Worth said. "It was right here. On the other side of them sand dunes, there's a big Bedouin family camped. They never had water out this far before, until we came, and now—"

Restraining his impatience, Hassan Bey said, "Tell us what happened."

"I don't know all of it, of course," Worth said, "and maybe he wouldn't have told me anything, except one night—four or five days ago—I came into his tent and he was having a set-to with two Arabs."

"Which two Arabs?" Hassan Bey demanded.

"One was an old Bedouin, the head of the family camped over there, and the other was our own emir here."

Emir really means "prince," but the Americans used it to mean simply "boss." E-Camp's "emir" was the boss Arab of the native workers.

"It was all in Arabic, of course," Worth went on, "but Jerry told me later what it was about."

Jock said sharply, "I'm surprised I didn't know anything about this."

Joe Worth looked apologetic. "He asked me not to tell anyone."

"Please go on," Hassan Bey said.

"Well, as Jerry told it, he was cruising around near the camp one day and saw this girl tending some camels. He stopped—to give her some chocolate and practice up on his Arabic, he said. Anyway, the girl ran off to her father, and next day the old man came over to the camp here, looking for blood. Good thing he went to the emir first seeing's he didn't know which American it was. Because the emir knew Jerry. They waited until Jerry

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came back from work, and then they went to see him. The emir and Jerry finally explained things, and gave the old man some presents, and calmed him down."

"Calmed him down!" Hassan Bey exclaimed. For all his years out here, apparently Joe Worth still did not understand how serious this was, in Arab eyes.

Jock Campbell said suddenly, "Wait a minute! There were some Arabs in here last night from the desert." He turned to Hassan Bey to explain. "There's no water within a hundred miles of here, except the well we've drilled, ourselves. We furnish it to the Bedouin when they want it."

Hassan Bey asked Worth, "Was the elderly Bedouin of whom you speak here last night also?"

But Worth said apologetically, "I didn't notice. They come and go so much. And in that get-up they all look the same to me." He flushed slightly, realizing that Hassan Bey was wearing the same get-up, himself.

Hassan Bey stood up. "I suggest," he said, "we see the emir at once."

But the emir was not in his private tent in the Arab part of the camp. His servant said the emir had driven off in a car that morning, he did not know where. Hassan Bey cross-examined the servant in rapid Arabic which I could barely follow.

He said, "The name of the emir is Abdul ibn Walid. I know who he is, but I did not know the Sheikh had sent him out here. Although he now lives in Bahmaar town, he is really of a desert tribe, the Beni Katif."

"That's the tribe that would be in these parts, isn't it?" I asked.

"Exactly," he said significantly.

Anne looked puzzled.

I had to show off some of the Arabic knowledge that had cost the company so much dough. "It's like this," I explained to her. "The Arabs take their tribal honor as seriously, almost, as their family honor. An insult to one man is an insult to the whole tribe, and anybody in the tribe can avenge it."

She caught on faster than I had to the geology talk. "And the emir and the girl's father are of the same tribe?"

"He is right," Hassan Bey said, "but it is difficult to believe an emir appointed by the Sheikh would do such a thing, and especially after waiting a few days. It would be done at once, or never. Still, it would be curious to know why he is away today, of all days."

"Maybe we can track him," I said.

"Out in that?" Anne objected, pointing to the thousands of car tracks that had chewed up the desert near the camp. "You'd never tell one from another."

"Don't be so sure," I said. I asked the servant if there were any men from the Al Wurra tribe among the Arab workers. He said there were

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four, and that one was an excellent man. I sent the servant to find him.

"The Al Wurra," I said to Anne, "are the most famous trackers in the whole Arab world. From an old camel track, they can tell whether it was male or female, about how old, whether loaded or not, probably where and when it had last watered. They can even recognize the print of a camel calf they've never seen—merely by the resemblance to the print of its mother."

The tracker came up, a lean and dignified young Bedouin. Since it was so unusual for the emir to leave camp, several Arabs had noticed which car he had taken and the general direction it followed.

After that, it was pie for the tracker. Apparently he could tell, by the sand that had sifted into the tracks, exactly how old they were. He sat on the front bumper, guiding us by hand signals.

The tracks led us over the sand hills and we came into a valley like the one we had just left, except that it had a few patches of brown grass, a few low bushes that still retained a slight greenish tinge.

A camel got to its feet and humped away in alarm. Soon we saw the Bedouin camp, a cluster of dark tents. A yellow company car was standing nearby, and two Arab watched us as we drove up.

At any other time I'd have liked nothing better than spending an afternoon in a real Bedouin camp. But today we were in a hurry. We didn't have time for all the ceremoney—and I remembered I hadn't reported to McLeod by radio yet.

"Can you try to cut it short?" I suggested to Hassan Bey.

He did pretty well. In the introductions, we mentioned Allah's blessings only about ten times, and "peace" only about five. The emir was a tall, stately Arab, with a cool look of authority. The old Bedouin seemed nervous, a rare thing among desert nomads, who usually look as calm as judges. Both wore Bahmaar daggers.

"Fadal! Welcome!" the old Bedouin murmured, showing us into his tent.

We sat down on worn carpets and leaned against camel saddles. Nothing short of Judgment Day could stop our host making coffee. The Arabs looked approvingly when Anne, after the third tiny cup, fluttered the cup to show she'd had enough. I'd taught her that—never to take more than three cups.

Hassan Bey got down to cases faster than I'd expected. Stripped of all the flowery phrases, the emir's story was this: The girl was 16. She hadn't understood a word of whatever it was Cameron had been trying to say to her. She was so shocked by having a man, and especially an infidel foreigner, approach her, she had run to her father.

The old man had ridden his camel over to E-Camp, calmly determined to kill the guilty man. He didn't know which one it was, of

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course, and went to the emir, who had calmed him down.

He explained that the American was an ignorant foreigner who didn't realize what he had done, and should be forgiven. He added casually that the foreigner was a *thaif*, a guest, of the powerful Sheikh of Bahmaar, and what is more sacred than a guest?

When Cameron returned from work, the emir and the old man had called on him in his tent. Cameron had apologized, explained he meant no harm, promised he would never do such a thing again. They had given the old Bedouin presents of rice and tobacco, and he had left, apparently mollified.

"I told him," the emir said, "that I covered the American with my face."

"That means," I whispered to Anne, "that, from then on, Cameron was under the emir's protection, and that if anything happened to him, the emir himself would have to avenge it."

I shook my head. "It gets screwier and screwier. If the old man had killed Cameron straight off, it would have been an honor killing, and he'd go scot-free. But if he did it *after* the emir covered Cameron with his face, then it would be up to the emir to kill the old man!"

"In some ways," she murmured, "things were simpler in Boston."

In English, I reminded Hassan Bey of what Jock had said: that there were some Bedouin Arabs in E-Camp yesterday. In turn, he asked the old man if he had been one of them.

"Wallahi! By God, yes!" he answered. He had indeed been to the camp of the infidels for water. But he had not as much as seen the foolish young man—may he rest in Paradise!

And what time had he come back?

The sun was resting on the desert in the west when he left the infidel camp, the old man said, and it was dark when he arrived back among his own tents.

The emir said stiffly, "Once I had covered the American with my face, this one would not have dared touch a hair of his head."

"Yet you came here to see him," Hassan Bey pointed out.

"It is true," the emir admitted, slightly disconcerted. "When I learned the young man had been killed, what could I think but that this one had done it?" He glared at the old man, who trembled. "But he has sworn by his face that he did not do this thing, and what can a Moslem do but believe him?"

"By my face" is about the strongest oath an Arab can swear.

Hassan Bey shrugged. "There is nothing more we can do here."

Desert oaths and traditions were a stone wall that not even the toughest Manhattan cop could break through.

Nevertheless, on the way back to E-Camp, I suggested that we drive

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over to the faint line of camel tracks that crossed the sand dunes. I had our tracker get out and examine them.

He worked no miracles. He said only that they had been made some time last night, and before dawn this morning. They had only today's sand sifted into them.

"So the old man," I said, "might be telling the truth and he might be lying."

"Still," Hassan Bey said, "it is out here in the desert where the old Bedouin traditions of revenge are strongest. In our towns, as you know, they are being softened and changed. And he is an old man, with old-fashioned ideas. It is true he would not swear such an oath lightly, but it is also true he would not let pass lightly an insult to his women."

"He still had a dagger," Anne pointed out. "But he could have had two, of course. They're as common as spoons are at home."

Back at E-Camp, we found none of the desert working parties had come back yet.

"But the man you want to see most," Jock said, "that is—Dusty Rhodes—ought to be in any time now. He's working fairly close to camp.

Hassan Bey went with the emir to the Arab workers' tents, to check up on them, and I got through to McLeod in Bahmaar by radio. I told him what we knew, and said I hoped we'd have more tomorrow, and he said—with a lot of unprintable elaboration—that he hoped so, too.

Out in the desert I noticed what looked like a vest-pocket sandstorm moving toward us.

"One of the work crews returning," Jock said. We watched until it came near. "Yes," he said, "that's Number Eight car. That's Dusty Rhodes."

"Don't tell him anything about what happened, Jock," I said. "Just send him in to see us."

"Right," Jock agreed.

Rhodes was of a medium height, stocky, with a bushy black beard that made him look a lot different than when I'd seen him in town.

"Why, howdy!" he said when he came in. He seemed surprised, and embarrassed about being half naked.

"Sit down, Dusty," I said. He edged into a chair as if it were red-hot. I decided to be blunt. Maybe his reactions would tell us something. "Jerry Cameron was stabbed to death last night, Dusty."

Even under the tan I could see the blood leave his face. There was a sudden, strange set to his face, something like triumph. He didn't look like the meek nobody I'd seen before. Then his expression changed. He stared at me, nodding his head, as if in a trance. "I get it," he said softly. "I get it now. You heard about that fight."

"That's right," I said.

"And you think I killed him!"

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He laughed a laugh that wasn't a laugh. "I wish I had. I should have. But the fact is, I didn't have the guts. He was a no-good—"

He stopped short then, remembering Anne was there. I realized he hated to talk about it in front of her, and she, bless her, got it at the same time.

"Before you start," she said casually, standing up, "hadn't I better go see about where we're sleeping tonight? Jock said he's setting up tents for us." She went out.

"What happened, Dusty?" I asked.

Bitterly, he confirmed what we had already heard. How Joe Worth normally took his letters to his wife, but how, on the one time, Cameron had done it—and thus met Viola Rhodes.

"They say the husband's the last one to know," he said, "and I guess that's right. Somebody made a crack. I didn't say anything to her directly, but I brought up his name, and she looked guilty . . . I'm ashamed of what's coming. When I got back here I didn't want to say anything till I was sure. So one day I played sick and didn't go out to work. The camp was almost empty. I sneaked into his tent and began looking. I figured maybe he'd have a letter from her, or something. And I found it!"

I waited until he had pulled himself together.

"It was in a folder with other letters and papers. She hadn't signed it, but I knew her writing. So that night I called him out and told him what I thought of him, and I let him have it. Then Mr. Campbell came—"

I nodded.

"He told us we'd get fired if we had any more trouble. Maybe it wasn't so much for Cameron; he was single. But I couldn't afford to get fired. A married man—" He stopped in sudden disgust. "Yeah," he said bitterly, "married!"

"No trouble since then?" I asked.

"None."

"Neither of you was back in Bahmaar on leave since?"

"No, it wasn't our turn. But when I do get back—" He fell silent, then looked at me defiantly. "Don't worry, there won't be another murder. Not that I killed Cameron, though. I didn't, even though I hated his guts."

We got nothing new out of him and let him go.

Hassan Bey shook his head. "Women! Your women of the West! Surely you will agree our way is better."

I grinned. "I might. Anne wouldn't."

"Do not be too sure," he smiled. "Women like to be dominated much more than you men of the West seem to believe." He shrugged. "But that is for another time. At any rate, Rhodes has confirmed one thing for us—that something has been stolen—at least, missing—from Cameron's tent."

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I didn't get it, and my face must have shown it.

"The papers," Hassan Bey explained. "Consider. This Cameron was carefully keeping some kind of records. Where are they? Rhodes saw a folder full of other letters and papers, perhaps the same records. Where are they?

"And you will remember," he went on, "how this morning you noticed the pile of typewriter paper had almost no sand dust on it, while everything else was thickly covered? Obviously this means only one thing, since the wind blows the sand in the daytime, never at night. It means that last night—after yesterday's wind and before today's wind—someone looked through that pile of paper, thereby disturbing the dust. And surely whoever took those papers is the murderer!"

His one-two-three logic made sense. Then he doused on the cold water.

"Unfortunately," he said, "it helps us little. For anybody could have taken them. Those with the best opportunity are the ones who remain always in camp, when the rest are away—Mr. Campbell and Mr. Worth. But Mr. Loomis, too, when he found the body, could have taken them. He says he reported the murder immediately, but is he telling the truth? And Mr. Rhodes—he knew exactly where the folder of paper was, and perhaps he wished to make sure no incriminating letters from his wife were found. So this helps us on our way not much—unless we find the papers in somebody's possession. And whoever took them will not be foolish enough to let them be found. We cannot even guess whether the stolen papers were taken because the murderer wanted the letters or the reports—or both."

Jock Campbell stuck his head in. "Sorry to bother you," he said, "but there's another car coming in now. There ought to be quite a few soon; it's getting late."

We talked to seven more men, and got pretty much the same answers. Cameron hadn't been popular, but they respected him. They all knew about the fight and about Cameron's visits to Viola Rhodes, and it was obvious they thought it was an open-and-shut case.

Three or four of them said that Cameron had been "too friendly" with the Arabs. Here in camp, they said, he was often over in the Arab tents.

"Even back on leave, it was the same thing," a surveyor named Smithson said. "He used to be down in the Arab part of town as much as he was over in the American compound."

Dinner was no Mardi Gras, but it wasn't as gloomy as I'd expected. Anne made the difference. The men watched her so closely they had trouble finding their mouths with the forks.

But the fact of murder lay over

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everything, and it was the surveyor Smithson who brought it out in the open.

"One thing's been bothering me," he said, looking at me hesitantly. "Supposin' it was an American that did it. Would they execute him the way they do other people in this country?"

I put my coffee cup down so hard I almost broke the saucer, as I remembered the last execution I'd seen. It had been in the town square of Bahmaar, before thousands of watching Arabs. In the center, the condemned man knelt with his hands tied behind him. By him were two slaves with swords. One pricked him sharply in the back, and, as he threw back his head in agony, the other swung his sword against the taut neck.

They were waiting for me to answer; this was my department.

"Yes," I said slowly. "That's the way it would be." I explained, almost arguing, that it couldn't be any other way. If an Arab committed murder in New York, we'd execute him in the electric chair, wouldn't we? And if an American committed murder here in Bahmaar, they'd execute him in their own way. "But let's hope it wasn't an American," I finished.

At night, it was hard to believe it was the same desert. The wind had vanished; the air was still and deliciously cool. There was no moon, but the stars were bright. Hassan Bey, Anne, and I walked together just outside the camp before turning in.

"Seems to me," Anne said, stifling a yawn, "that you've found out a lot."

I nodded. "But it all points in opposite directions. One is just plain woman trouble—which would make it Dusty Rhodes or the old Bedouin. But that doesn't seem to tie in with Cameron's missing papers, or the secret records he was keeping in duplicate."

"They weren't so secret," she said. "The others knew about them—some, anyway. And neither of you have ever said *why* you think he'd have been keeping duplicate records."

"Zaradin," Hassan Bey said calmly.

"Zaradin!" she echoed. "But why?"

"Surely," he said, "if Zaradin is interested in Bahmaar oil, he is the kind of man to bribe someone to let him know how your exploration is coming, whether you are finding oil or not."

"No," she said positively. "I've been thinking it over, and it just doesn't make sense. I know it sounds funny to a layman, but the fact is that nobody in E-Camp, except Cameron, would know whether we're finding oil or not."

Hassan Bey stared at her. "I do not understand," he said. "Surely these men who are looking for oil will know if they find it!"

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She smiled. "In the old days, yes. They'd just drill, and if a well came in, everybody within miles would know. But not these days. It's all mathematics and instrument readings. They have to be put together back in Bahmaar. The people out here send in their figures, but they haven't any idea what they mean."

"Not even Mr. Campbell?" Hassan Bey asked.

"No, not even him," she said. "He sends in a weekly report, and it's only one little piece in a jigsaw puzzle that has thousands of pieces." She laughed. "If Zaradin wanted to hire a spy, he should have hired somebody in the Bahmaar geological office. Somebody like me!"

I put in an oar. "But maybe Zaradin didn't understand this any more than Hassan Bey or I. Maybe he, too, thought a man in the desert would know what was going on. And the spy in the desert took his money, and kidded him along."

"Zaradin would have advisers who know the score," she argued. "Besides, there's another good reason why a spy would do him no good at all."

"Go ahead," I prompted her.

"It's just plain logic," she began. "Suppose we *are* finding oil. Of course, we'll take up our option, and Zaradin wouldn't have a look-in. So that's no good to him, is it? And then suppose we *aren't* finding oil. Then he wouldn't want the concession, would he?"

It sounded airtight. I heard Hassan Bey murmuring something in Arabic, and I recognized part of the Fourth Sura of the Koran: "Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God hath gifted the one above the other." He sounded doubtful, as if wondering whether the Prophet had ever known a woman like Anne.

I thought I found a loophole in her logic. "Even so," I said, "wouldn't it be worth a lot of money to Zaradin—or somebody else—to know ahead of time whether we're finding oil or not? A man with inside knowledge could clean up by buying stock ahead of time."

"Only if we *are* finding oil," she said. "In that case, the stock would go up and, as you say, he'd make a fortune. But if we *aren't* finding oil, the stock won't go *down*. Its present price is based on our present fields, and, as you know, we've got oil enough already to last for years and years."

Then Hassan Bey threw a bombshell. "Tell me," he said to Anne, *"are you finding oil out here?"*

We stared at him. This was the company's top secret. Well as I knew Anne, I didn't know, myself, whether they were finding oil or not.

"I quite understand," Hassan Bey was saying, "what I am asking. But I ask it because, in any event, the exploration should be finished in three more weeks and it will then

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become public knowledge. And I have a strong feeling still, despite your inexorable logic, that this somehow has to do with the death of the young man. And further, I swear to you, by my face, that I shall never breathe a word to anyone until you permit me."

Anne looked at me, mutely asking what to do. I thought over what he said, and it made sense. "I think it's okay," I told her. "If you know, tell him."

"All right," she said. She took a deep breath. "Here goes: no, there isn't any oil out here. We're turning Zone IV back to the Sheikh."

"So!" Hassan Bey murmured. He was silent a moment, and then he sighed. "You are right," he declared. "If there is no oil here, Zaradin will not want the concession at any price, nor can he make money by buying your stock—which will neither go up nor down."

"We're not getting anywhere," I said. "Suppose we sleep on it."

Like the rest, we had separate tents assigned to us. We came to Hassan Bey's first. We said good night. He hesitated, and finally said, "There is one thing that puzzles me."

"Only one?" I retorted.

"Among many," he conceded. "But does it not seem surprising that this should happen on the very night before this young lady arrives?"

"So what?" I demanded, and Anne gestured impatiently.

"I have not the slightest theory," he admitted. "Perhaps it is only a coincidence. But it is another thing we can sleep on. Good night."

At her tent, I kissed Anne good night. Then I walked on slowly to my own. All the tents were dark; the men turned in early. Yet the three trailers blazed with lights, and in the office trailer I saw Jock Campbell at work, setting down the day's reports.

With its big glass windows, the office trailer was like a Fifth Avenue shop window. Monotonously, like a machine, Jock would turn to the electric computing machine, make a quick calculation, then write the result on his progress sheet.

The only sound was the steady beat of the Diesel generator. I turned in.

Yet, whipped as I was, I couldn't get to sleep. And suddenly I felt hungry. I hadn't eaten much all day. I recalled the cook trailer was always open for anybody, any time.

I slipped on slacks and shoes, and went out. The camp seemed really asleep now. All three trailers still flooded light into the desert, and the Diesel generator still snored away regularly. Jock had gone to bed. My watch said ten minutes to one.

I stopped suddenly. A dark figure was crossing the space between the office trailer and the one which held the generator. It was no Arab; it wore no gown.

Pretending to be strolling around,

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I walked to the door of the generator trailer. Inside, a man was crouched on the floor in the glare of a work light, his back to me.

"Hi!" I said, trying to make it light.

Joe Worth spun around, startled. "Oh!" he said. "It's you!"

"You work mighty late," I said easily. "They give you overtime?"

He chuckled. "That'll be the day! Nope, in lots of ways, nighttime's the best time to work out here, with no sun and sand and heat to bother you. Me and Mr. Campbell, we work more nights than we do in the daytime."

"Makes a long day," I said.

"Yep, with him, he's got to work up all them reports the boys bring back in the evening. And me, well, either the cars or these generators is always givin' trouble. The sand gets into the breathers and clogs up the filters."

"The generator runs night and day?" I asked.

"That's right," he said. "Otherwise the food would spoil in them big electric iceboxes. We've got two sets of generators, because one's always broke down. I'm workin' on one of 'em right now."

"Speaking of refrigerators," I said, "can I just take whatever I want?"

"Sure thing!" Joe Worth smiled. "It's all yours. Just make yourself at home."

I said good night and went into the cook trailer. The huge refrigerators looked like delicatessens. I picked out some sliced ham and made a sandwich.

I heard nothing until the screen door squeaked behind me.

Jim Loomis came in. "Oh, you here, too?"

He tried to act surprised, but it didn't work. I knew that, with the big windows, he would have seen me long before he came in.

"I didn't eat much today," I said.

"Me either." He made a roast beef sandwich.

"Ugly mess," he said at last. He didn't mean the sandwich.

"Sure is," I said, and that was all. I decided he was being nosey and wanted to know what we knew. His dark eyes were bright and questioning.

"Seems funny," I said, "to leave the lights on day and night."

He seemed disappointed. "Why not?" he shrugged. "The generator's got to run anyway. Besides, there's always somebody working—Joe or the boss."

"Rough day," I said. "Does Mr. Campbell work long at night?"

"Four or five hours, depending," he said, his voice curious again.

I tried to keep it casual. "He work alone?" I asked.

The casual business didn't work. Ferretlike, Loomis sniffed out some purpose. "Why, yes, he does," he answered slowly. "It's a one-man job. On everyone of these readings he's got to make the corrections. It's not really hard, of course, but he's got

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to keep his wits about him. With a lot of noise around, he'd get mixed up."

I shook my head and yawned. "No job for me. I darn' near flunked math." We finished the sandwiches and I decided to get rid of him. We walked back to the tent area together. When we reached his I said, "Guess I'll get something to read. I saw some books in the office trailer." I turned away.

"Well—good night," he said reluctantly, and went into his tent.

The door of the office trailer was unlocked, too. I went in and spent some time picking out a book. I knew that anybody in the camp could see me plainly. I sat down on the high chair before the work table and pretended to be leafing through the book.

I was sitting where Jock sat when he made out his report sheets. He worked alone, at night, and I wondered if anybody could have spied on him, to see exactly what he put down.

The work table ran the full width of the trailer, at the rear. On each end were big windows. I realized that if anybody could look in those windows, close up, it would be exactly like looking over Jock's shoulder.

The trailer was parked so that one side faced the American tents, fairly close, while the other was toward the Arab camp, a couple hundred yards away. I went outside—and saw at once that the trailer window was much too high above the ground for anybody to look in. I walked around to the other side of the trailer and felt my blood pump faster.

An oil drum stood on end just a little in front of the rear window on that side! And it had been there a long time; the wind had piled up sand high around it.

I climbed up on the drum and looked inside the trailer. It was perfect. It was exactly like being at Jock's elbow while he worked. Anybody could watch him, and probably never be seen. I was so close I was pretty sure I could have made out the actual figures Jock wrote down. Certainly, with field glasses adjusted to the shortest possible range—and I remembered the field glasses in Jerry Cameron's foot locker!

For a moment I was sorry I'd climbed on the oil drum so fast; the greasy top might have shown good prints, and I'd scuffed them out. Then I remembered that every American wore exactly the same kind of work shoe anyway, the kind sold in the company canteen.

Slowly I walked back to my tent.

Maybe Anne's logic was airtight, but Hassan Bey's instinct was just as good. Beyond any doubt, somebody had been spying on Jock Campbell, and watching him make up his reports.

(continued on page 99)

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Here is Anthony Boucher's "maiden murder"—his very first short story of crime, written in January 1936. Within its relatively few words, it is a genuine "period piece"—of the 1930s in America.

Actually, the story was turned down by every editor to whom it was submitted in the late 1930s. This, then, is the story's first appearance in a magazine. But if we had been given, in the early days of EQMM, the opportunity to publish this "first story," we would have been happy and honored to be responsible for Anthony Boucher's "baptism in print."

DEATH CAN BE BEAUTIFUL

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

IN THE SPRING OF THAT YEAR THEY were both completely unknown. They said goodbye in a cheap beer joint. There was a red and white checked cloth on the table, and the pianist was playing a Rodgers an Hart tune of six months past.

Lawrence Winton looked at his departing friend, felt low, and ordered another beer.

Al Hanford had never seemed more hale or blithe. His coming wanderings in Mexico inspired him, and he talked gaily and unceasingly. But Winton felt a self-conscious sense of foreboding. It was, he supposed, because he was a poet and imagined some sort of damned obligation to spread a blob of lyric sadness over any suitable occasion.

For one clear analytical moment Winton looked at Hanford and wondered why they were friends. He was acute enough, in these rare instants of clear vision, to see through Hanford's surface charm to the weakness beneath it. But the fresh round of beer came, Al began to speak of the volume of verse which Winton had submitted to the Caxton Printers, and the rare instant passed . . .

The Caxton Printers were reaching a conclusion on that volume on the day in July when Lawrence Winton learned of his friend's death at the hands of Mexican bandits. He was seated at his desk when the telegram came (a letter with his return address had been found on the body), and his world folded.

There was no clear instant in this grief, only the knowledge that his friend was dead. For a moment Winton held in his hand the paper

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cutter—a small dagger which Al Hanford had picked up somewhere in the East. It was still sharp and would serve. But he threw it down and took up his pencil instead.

It was midnight before he had stopped writing, erasing, rewriting, and shaping. He was hungry and his hand was cramped, but on his desk lay the final draft of *Threnody—for Alaric.*

His mind was unable to judge the poem then. His only thought was a vague surprise at the realization that he had never written out Al's full name before. He looked at the threnody for a little while and then went to the kitchen to fry an egg.

The letter from the Caxton Printers came two days later. The editors were mildly enthusiastic about his verse, but found the quantity submitted slight. If he had some longer work to round out the volume . . . So Winton typed out a copy of *Threnody* and sent it on.

SATURN IN SABLES, by Lawrence Winton, was published in due time. It got passable notices and, for verse, nearly passable sales, and that was all. Winton went on teaching night school and lucky to have that. And then someone gave a copy of the book to Alexander Woollcott.

So impressed was he by *Threnody,* although the other poems left him unmoved, that he devoted an entire radio program to sugared ecstasies on the greatest elegy of our times, ending by reading, with orchestral accompaniment, extensive excerpts. With unerring taste he chose exactly those portions which Winton, on reading the printed volume, had decided should be cut if the book ever saw another edition.

The next day every librarian, public or rental, found himself besieged by customers who demanded the book that had *Threnody* in it. The title of the book and the name of the author were generally unknown. Those librarians who had heard the Woollcott broadcast had already, and wisely, ordered copies. The others lost no time in identifying the desired book.

Within a week Lawrence Winton was famous and *Threnody* had become a byword. Much to his own surprise, he discovered that in this expression of his purely personal grief and hope he had written a comforting panacea for America's sorrows. The ever narcotic assurance that death is, after all, a beautiful thing had never before been expressed in words so suited to the understanding of the American public.

In its own lyric way *Threnody* became a public menace, in the manner of *Yes, We Have No Bananas* or a *Music Goes Round and Round.* Bing Crosby scored an even greater hit than usual as the introducer of a new song entitled *Threnody.* (It ended: "for this melody

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is my threnody of love.") Benjamin Z. Fineberg bought the film rights to the title and handed the poem to five writers in turn, with injunctions to turn out a story treatment on this by Monday. Of the five writers, only three were shortly removed to sanitariums for acute alcoholism.

Lestrois Parish compiled a two-page article for Hearst's "American Weekly" on the world's great elegies. The literati succumbed to the craze, and argued violently as to whether *Threnody* bore more resemblance to *Lycidas* or to *Adonais*. A minority held out for *Thyris*. The "Journal of English and Germanic Philology" published a carefully annotated essay on "Lawrence Winton's *Threnody*: A comparative study in the influences of Milton, Shelley, Arnold, and Jorge de Manrique." Manrique, whom Winton had never read, was an easy winner.

James Hilton, who had himself endured an almost equally amazing mass enthusiasm, referred in a radio talk to Mr. Winton's admirable *Threenody*. This sent thousands scurrying to the Oxford English Dictionary, and set other thousands writing indignantly to their pet radio editors. Fifty-three per cent of these managed an indirect reference to England's war debt.

Corey Ford wrote an ingenious parody on the poem, which was refused by his publishers as being in questionable taste. Mr. Ford consoled himself with a brilliant burlesque of all raves on *Threnody*.

Only the "New Masses" remained immune to the epidemic; and even there Granville Hicks contrived to mention Lawrence Winton's obvious subconscious fascism.

And Chico Marx, in a Kaufman-Ryskind political satire, described himself as a threnody people.

Lawrence Winton, meanwhile, gave up his teaching job two weeks after the Woollcott broadcast. Mr. Fineberg's check for the film rights was in itself enough to keep him comfortable for years, to say nothing of the royalties on the book itself and the income from subsidiary rights. He realized that this wild popularity was bound to blow up in time. Consequently he lived quietly as always and saved most of his fabulous earnings.

He had begun the new narrative poem for which his publishers were so eager when he received a telegram from Mr. Fineberg begging him to come to Hollywood at once on his own terms. *Threnody* was causing a tragic depletion in the ranks of Fineberg writers, and that genius of screen production had decided to let the author do his own adaptation.

The prospect fascinated and terrified Lawrence Winton. He had never written anything in the least dramatic, and yet he had the feel-

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ing common to all who ever attend the films that, by God, he could do better than that. He was still in lonely indecision when the doorbell rang.

It was some minutes before he recognized in this bearded, shabby tramp his friend Al Hanford.

When recognition came, he seized Al warmly by the hand. Hanford answered the grip indifferently and walked into the house. First he asked for a drink, and then congratulated Winton on his success. Not until after the second drink could he be made to tell how he happened to be alive.

It was simple enough. He had had pressing reasons (which he left purposely vague) for disappearing. He stumbled across the corpse of a victim of bandits, planted all his identification on it, and vanished. When at last he heard of the success of *Threnody,* he could not rest until he had thanked his friend for that magnificent tribute.

Throughout his narrative Al smiled absently as though thinking of what he was leading up to. Soon he began to point out what would happen if his continued life became known. He chose his words sharply. Winton writhed as Al outlined the country's reaction. People would think the whole thing a hoax in bad taste. Not only would money stop coming in, but Winton's further writings would prove quite unsalable. It was a convincing picture.

He ended with the obvious proposition. Fifty per cent of Winton's income paid to him through specified channels—and Al would remain dead.

Winton looked at him a long while. He saw what he would be damned to—utter servile dependence on this weakling cheat. All his former moments of clear vision were concentrated now in one blazing light.

But he saw more. He saw that Hanford had changed, changed so much that he himself could scarcely recognize him. He saw that the clothes looked like those of any tramp, and that nothing about the man could suggest to anyone the object of the famous *Threnody.*

He slipped the paperknife in his pocket unobserved. After a moment's silence he gave a nod of assent and rising walked behind Al Hanford's chair . . .

On the way back from his long automobile drive to the outskirts of town, where tomorrow an unidentified vagabond would be found dead, Winton stopped at a telegraph office to send his acceptance to Benjamin Z. Fineberg.

Death was, he thought as he signed the blank, an even more beautiful thing than he had ever realized.

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a new story by

MARK VAN DOREN

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	MARK VAN DOREN
TITLE:	*The Only Bottomless Thing*
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVES:	Sergeant Lord and Trooper Cox
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Another "purely luminous" story of crime and detection by one of America's most distinguished poets, teachers, and critics.*

BIG ANDY CAME OUT OF THE MARCH woods, his ax over his shoulder, just as the troopers turned in and stopped. The brightwork on their uniforms caught the same sun that flashed from the blade which Big Andy, seeing them down by the house, shifted to his other shoulder. He did this without change of stride, but one of the troopers noticed it and wondered if it meant Big Andy was nervous.

The trooper, Harlan Cox, was nervous himself, though he concealed this from the sergeant beside him. He had known Big Andy all his life, and as a boy had been his neighbor, on the next farm along the way to Gotham. His father had been Big Andy's special friend; they had helped each other on many a rainy day.

"Hello, Harlie," said Big Andy, arriving. "Who's this you got with you? Come in." He lowered his ax to the white ground.

Was it possible that he didn't know why they were here?

"This is Sergeant Lord," said Harlan. None of them had moved, and the older officer only nodded.

"Sergeant Lord," said Big Andy, as if to memorize the name. "All right, come in!"

But neither of the troopers took a step along the path that had been shoveled through last night's new snow. It was powdery all around them, and glistened in the sun.

"We are here," said Sergeant Lord at last, "to look into something. Maybe you can help us."

"Why, if I can—when I know what it is."

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Was it possible, said Harlan to himself again.

"You must know, Mr. Sheppard." Lord said this so softly that Harlan looked sidewise at him in surprise. But the sergeant himself was looking neither at him nor at the huge man he addressed. He seemed fascinated by the column of smoke that rose out of the woods where Sheppard had been. Somewhere up there a fierce fire was burning.

Big Andy, as if he understood, gestured with his free thumb without turning around. "Oh, I didn't need a permit for that. As long as snow's on the ground we don't have to call the warden. No danger when the leaves are covered. Now in a couple of weeks it will be different—I wouldn't even ask him then. That's the bad time; even after a rain it isn't safe. I took this chance to clean up a lot of pine limbs I trimmed last fall. They laid so thick you couldn't walk anywhere up there. Some whole trees, too; dead ones. I dragged them into a pile as high as a house, and this morning I burned them. Started them with an old tire and a tin can of kerosene—you know. Dirty work." He glanced down apologetically at the front of his woollen jacket. There were smudges on it, from the smoke, and a few holes where sparks had fallen. Leaning the ax handle against his knee, he spread both hands, backs up, to show how the red hair on them was singed. "So if you're worried about that fire being legal, it is."

"Quite right," said Lord. "But it wasn't that we came about."

"Well, I'm relieved. I thought—"

"It was your nephew. What do you think happened to him?"

"Little Ben! So you knew he was gone?" No man could have acted more amazed.

"We certainly did," said Lord. "That's why—" Then he stopped, motioning for Harlan to explain.

Harlan, wishing he were home at the barracks, ran a finger back and forth inside his collar before he said, "Big Andy, there's been talk."

"About *him?* Well, Harlie, why shouldn't there be? He walked out of here night before last while I was asleep and I haven't laid eyes on him since. Say! Do *you* know where Little Ben is? Has word come—did somebody find him? Was there trouble? Is he hurt—or worse?" The questions came fast, as if they had been prepared.

"No," said Harlan, "nothing like that." He remembered how full of words Big Andy always was. His father used to call him—affectionately, to his face—Big Mouth. It might be hard to get anything out of him now except what he wanted to say. Of course, there might be nothing to all the talk. Maybe there was nothing for the big redhead *to* say. But Harlan had his instructions.

"No," he began again. "Little Ben has disappeared, and we're here to

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investigate some rumors. You know Freddie Updike."

"That flea."

"Well," said Harlan, "he told us he was going by here two days ago and heard you having it out with Little Ben about something. Said you were hollering. Said you were good and mad."

Big Andy's hand tightened around the handle of his ax. There was something else Harlan remembered about him: he had a temper. Not often, but when it took him he might do anything, or so people believed. His father wasn't afraid of him; others, however, said they were, and thought twice before they went to see him.

The old house had few visitors. The big man and the little man—brother Oliver's son who was left an orphan years ago—had never qualified as members of Gotham society in good standing. Ben was famous for how *little* he said. Gray-headed, gray-faced, he sometimes grinned, but he didn't converse. Some people found this harder to like than his uncle's loose tongue. He made you feel that *you* had talked too much. Otherwise he would strike a stranger, if he struck him at all, as foolish-minded. Not good for much, the verdict ran.

Big Andy lifted the ax an inch and let it fall; he did this again, and then again. "Freddie Updike! He must have been at the kitchen window, the sneak. That's where we were arguing. Or I was. Ben wouldn't say a word—a habit of his sometimes, and it *could* make me mad. It made me mad then, and I said plenty, trying to get an answer out of him. But no, he wouldn't give me the satisfaction. I guess I called him names—more than usual, and maybe worse—because that night he slipped out like I told you. Waited till I was dead to the world, then took his clothes—not all of them, though—and went. Not a peep from him since. But he'll be back, Ben will."

Then the big man remembered who had gone to the police, and the axhead fairly drummed on the frozen ground. "Freddie Updike!" Both troopers were glad they hadn't brought their witness with them. This giant was capable of cutting a man's head in two before he knew what he was doing.

But just as suddenly he subsided. "It was none of his business," he said, "and maybe it's none of yours. Nevertheless and notwithstanding, what he told you was the truth. I did get awful sore at Ben, I really did, and now that I think of it, I'm sore again." Both of his hands twitched. "When you live with someone like that, he ought to hold up his end of a conversation."

Sergeant Lord interrupted him. "What was the argument about, if *it's* any of our business?"

Big Andy widened his eyes; then squinted; then pulled his cap down tighter over his forehead. "Now that's funny. If I could remember,

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I'd sure tell you. But I don't. It was some little thing that makes no difference any more, or I'd remember. It was like that with Ben and me. We'd carry on—or I would—about the tiniest little speck of a thing, and next day I couldn't have said for love or money what it was. Probably some tool I couldn't find and said he'd lost, or maybe a pot or a pan, and he shook his head but wouldn't help me look for it. He would tease me that way. I had to rummage for myself." He looked at Lord with a show of concern. "You believe me, don't you?"

The sergeant hesitated. "I guess I do." Then with no warning he changed the subject. "The fire up there—we want to see that next. Don't we, Cox?"

Harlan, startled into saying "Yes," glanced at Big Andy, who must have expected this even less than he had, for he let the handle of his ax topple over into the snow, where it disappeared.

"Yes, sir," said Harlan firmly, adjusting his hat. "We ought to have a look at the fire."

"What if I said you couldn't?" Big Andy had picked up the ax and was wiping it off. "What if I said you had no right? The law can't go everywhere on a man's land, at least without the proper papers. You know that, Harlie. When you started being a cop, we talked about the things you couldn't and could do."

Harlan remembered. Big Andy had astonished him by knowing so much, or letting on he did.

"Are you saying," asked Lord, "you don't want us to go up there? If so, is there any special reason? You know, Mr. Sheppard, we could get the papers."

Big Andy broke into laughter. It shook him all over. "Why, Sergeant Lord. I was only fooling. You go on up. Go on, and when you come back down there'll be coffee ready. Harlie, I'd ask you to throw some ends in—you know how a fire won't eat out to the last foot or foot and a half of a green stick; but you'd muss up your uniform. My, what a sight that is. Your dad would be proud."

He turned toward the house as if he hadn't a worry in the world, and the troopers started up the snowy trail to the opening in the woods and the blue smoke beyond.

Harlan reflected that it had been years since he played here as a boy. He and his brothers used to ascend by this same path, then tiptoe through the pines like Indians tracking down an enemy. It was silent up there, so that the snapping of a twig sounded like rifle fire. Off to the right, where the ground grew rough, they had climbed great boulders and shouted down into crevices which they called canyons. They thought then that these were bottomless; he smiled now, being sure they were mere fissures between the granite ledges.

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One *was* deep, though, he remembered; their voices kept echoing among its depths. They never climbed down there because it seemed too narrow; they were afraid they would get stuck where nobody could hear them call for help. But the pines, level and noiseless, were their favorite resort. He wasn't sorry to be seeing them again. Big Andy couldn't have chopped them all down.

"Would you say he missed his nephew much?" Lord spoke as if he had chosen his question carefully.

"You mean, sir, enough?"

"Why, yes. That's a better way to put it."

"I don't know," said Harlan. "He's always been a queer one."

"Still is," said Lord.

"Yes. I can't make him out."

"I can, I think. What about this? Of course we'll have a look at the house when we come down, but first I want to poke around that fire. A good way to cover up a grave."

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Why not? The best way, for nothing would show. Mightn't the snow last night have been a lucky thing for Sheppard? Without it he couldn't have built a fire—a big one, he says—and so could never have concealed a shallow grave. Or deep; it wouldn't matter; the traces show. You noticed he tried to keep us from looking."

"Not very hard, though, if at all. He said he was fooling."

"He said so when he had to."

"That could be."

They went on in silence till the bonfire was before them. Big Andy had not exaggerated its size. They could see where the surrounding pines were trimmed of their lower branches—the dead ones, that make such perfect kindling—and it was clear that logs had been dragged here too. The snow in every direction was thoroughly trampled. And the fire itself was burning, as Lord remarked, like a barn struck by lightning. Some ends, fallen away, revealed what a thick bed of ashes was building up in the center: a bed ten feet each way, and of course impossibly hot to poke in now.

Lord considered what he saw, and said, "Cremation."

"Listen, sir, I can't believe—"

"In our business, boy, you've got to be willing to believe regardless. Why can't you this time?"

"I've always known Big Andy. He's harmless."

"So was many a killer before he killed. I'm going by what they tell me—not only Updike, but the other neighbors."

"They told you about Big Andy?"

"No, about Little Ben. What *they* can't believe is that he would run away. No spunk—they used that word to the last man. They simply can't see him going off by himself, or if he did, staying away two nights and days. He'd be afraid to, Mrs. Huber said down at the inter-

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section. They won't go quite this far, but what they've been trying to tell me is that they think Sheppard slugged him—of course without premeditation, in a quarrel, and maybe with his ax—and then was sorry. Whenever I suggested that the body would immediately become a problem, they acted dumb; or else they *were* dumb. I suppose they think he could have buried Ben anywhere up here on the mountain. They don't know how easy that would be to prove. Then last night it snowed and Sheppard saw his chance—I mean, he could have. He was big enough to carry Ben up here and bury him, then start this fire and let her blaze. Who would think of digging under that? They wouldn't. But I do."

"Now?"

"Oh, no, we'll get help. We dig, but not that way. We'll go down and dig a little deeper into Sheppard—if we can get through those layers of language—and his house and barn. He said, didn't he, that Ben left some of his effects? A lot of things can be left."

"He could tell us, if we asked him right"—Harlan seemed to be rehearsing the question—"what Little Ben had on in the way of clothes."

"That's right," said Lord. "Now you're serious. Which reminds me. Whatever Ben wore, nobody has seen him in forty-eight hours. I can't get over the feeling that somebody would have, somewhere. Not a word, however. He's completely disappeared."

"I wonder what they quarreled about," said Harlan.

"It could be just what he said. I'm told he treated Ben like a little boy—laughed at him, called him names, whistled to him like a dog. All in fun, clean fun, and yet—"

"It wasn't quite that bad," said Harlan.

But now they were back at the house, in the front door of which Big Andy stood waving a battered coffee pot.

"Come in, come in!" he shouted.

They followed him back to the kitchen, a disorderly room, overheated at the moment, with one small window looking up the mountain.

"Wasn't that some fire?" He set out two extra cups and saucers.

"Some fire," said Lord. "You still think, Mr. Sheppard, your nephew will come back?"

"Bound to, bound to. This is Ben's only home, and I'm his only uncle—his only relation, if you want to know the truth. I reported him that way once to the welfare people that came nosing around—they didn't need to, we fare all right—and it's the heavenly truth. Sugar? Milk?"

Back at the barracks that evening Lord and Cox sat with the lieutenant, going over what they knew.

"You don't know much," concluded the lieutenant. "You found

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nothing in the house or the outbuildings, and you didn't dig anything out of Sheppard. Do you think I could?"

"No, sir," said Lord. "But what about the fire?"

"Oh, yes, the fire. I could send up a detail for that tomorrow morning. You recommend it?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"All right. But now you two men sleep on this. If the nephew hasn't come back by tomorrow—at ten, say—and if no word has come in of anybody seeing him, or giving him a lift, you may proceed. Incidentally, you say Sheppard spoke of papers. I'll have them ready."

Big Andy, his inseparable ax beside him, was with them while the digging went on. He had said he wanted to be, and they had no authority to confine him elsewhere.

"I know what you're looking for," he said. "Or who. My little Ben. Wouldn't it be a joke if he slipped up here now and just stood back there watching us? It would be like him not to make any noise."

Lord sent a quick glance over his shoulder, and Big Andy roared. "Yes," he said, "it would be funny. Tell your men to go deep, Sergeant, and far out around. No guessing where them little bones will be, and them little buttons."

Nobody acknowledged this, partly because the work was finished. Every man present seemed to agree that there was no sense in digging further. The embers of yesterday's fire were scattered far and wide, and a hole ten feet square yawned where the pale gray ashes had been. There was no need of digging deep: roots ran across the hole, and nowhere had they been severed. There was not enough free earth, Big Andy once observed, to bury a 'coon in, let alone a man. But he had urged them on. A fine sight, he said; all that work for nothing.

"Fill it in," said Lord to the men as they rested on their shovels, "we're through."

"Are you through with me, Sergeant?" Big Andy looked at him with mockery in his eyes; or it could have been simple amusement.

"Yes, but stay home. We may be back to talk to you again."

Big Andy fairly trembled with mirth. "Where would *I* go? And if I did go, who wouldn't see me? It's not like little Ben. *No*body saw *him*. Nobody does now."

It was almost, Harlan thought, as if he dared them to use their eyes; as if it were a game, and something had been hidden in plain sight that you could see if you knew the rules. But no, nothing like that. Big Andy was only crowing. Not that this was like him either. Harlan would be glad when the whole thing was over.

Just the same he swept all the woods he could see with a gaze that troubled him because it stirred in him a vague feeling of discomfort. He ought to be satisfied with what

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had happened, yet suddenly he wasn't. He even stared up into the treetops, the ones Big Andy had spared; and in one of them he made out an unusually large squirrel's nest—a ball of brown leaves almost as big as Ben. Not quite, though. It was nothing but a last-year's nest.

He dropped his eyes and looked off through the pines whose trunks Big Andy had trimmed. A narrow shaft of sunlight, so far away it seemed unearthly, slanted down through the waving tops this side of the boulders where he used to play. The Devil's Den, his brother Hanely called it; Hanley had been to Gettysburg, and he was the one that named the crevices between the ledges. Canyons, he insisted, like out West, with invisible rivers rushing through: subterranean, and all that. He even claimed he heard the black water. The others, who couldn't, refused to let him climb down and see.

The shaft of sun moved on, and there in the distance was one of the boulders. Beyond it, if Harlan had his bearings right, was the very crack they had believed to be bottomless, the one they almost feared —except that Hanley didn't—to lean over and look down into all the way.

All the way.

A wonderful place to lose something.

To lose a man.

His heart thumped, and he felt a compulsion to look over at Big Andy, who had not followed the rest of the party when it started down, with Lord in the rear.

Big Andy, with no expression on his face whatever, was looking at *him*, and Harlan knew that he had been doing so for some time—nothing else would explain the blankness in his eyes. Then he too had seen the sunlight on the boulders, and guessed how much they meant to Harlan.

The voices of the descending men came faintly up to them, suggesting to Harlan that he say, "Well! I don't know what I'm doing here!"

He said it, rather too loudly, and started off. But Big Andy, still serious, got in his way. "No," he said, "you come with me. I want to show you something, Harlie. Won't take long."

He motioned with his ax for Harlie to go ahead of him toward the boulders. The sun had left them now, and they were scarcely visible, but Big Andy didn't seem to think he needed to explain.

"No," said Harlan, "you go first. What is it, anyway?"

No answer, and no argument. Harlan had expected Big Andy to brandish his ax and motion him on, but instead he took the lead, his enormous back shutting out the view of everything ahead. He shuffled through the snow without a word, only pausing now and then to whack off a branch he could have stepped around had he chosen.

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He was going the shortest and straightest way.

Harlan stroked the handle of his revolver. It was the first rule he had been taught: to cover his man. Big Andy had only his ax, but in such hands as his it was a fast weapon—as fast as a knife, almost as fast as a bullet. Harlan, who had never shot a man, had no intention of shooting Big Andy, unless—

Oh, it seemed preposterous. Yet something in that expressionless face had warned him, and he watched every swing of the ax before him. It would come back all the way if its master wanted; a turn of the wrist, and it could cut a man in two. The chest, the face—

Harlan put his left hand to his forehead, and found a little sweat there. Exertion could not have caused it; the ground was rougher now, they were stepping over stones and logs, but still that wasn't why. He was afraid. He must keep his eye on the ax.

Then they arrived. The biggest of the boulders—Mt. Tom, Hanley had called it, after the only eminence he knew by name—rose directly in front of them. This side was round, but the far side dropped straight off as if a great butcher knife had cleaved it—dropped off, and then down there was the river, if there was any river.

Big Andy climbed without a word and at the top stood looking into the crevasse.

"Come on, Harlie, this was what I aimed to show you." He said it over his shoulder, not very loud, as if he were still thinking. His ax was quiet in his hand.

Harlan glanced both ways, saw nothing, and climbed after him.

"Now!" said Big Andy. "You don't see anything, do you? Dark as it is down there, you still could see a dead man if there was one. But there isn't, is there?"

Harlan, keeping all the distance he could between them, leaned over and saw nothing but the damp granite sides and patches of moss, of lichen.

"No," he said, "there isn't."

"But there is!" Big Andy's voice rose in sudden high excitement. "Ben's down there. That's where I put him. Lord, the big fool, thought I burned him. Well, I wanted him to think that. Then *you* had to be along, remembering this place from when you used to come up with the other kids and play. It put an idea in your head, didn't it? Too bad, because you're going down there too."

Harlan looked at him without moving, certainly without touching his gun, which he wasn't sure he could draw faster than Big Andy could swing his ax. For the moment, though, something else kept him stationary. What he had heard was unbelievable.

"You're joking, Big Andy." He would try that.

"I am, am I? By God, it's been no joke." There was a break in Big

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Andy's voice, though not enough of one to make it sound undecided. "I never meant to kill him. It was like I said to Lord—or if it wasn't, that's no matter. I felt terrible when I saw I had. Then I thought of this place. And then *you* did. And so"—

"But listen, Big Andy. The sergeant will know—they all will—when you go down without me. You can't do this."

"I can't, can't I? Who says I'm going down *there?* Who says I won't go where you are, and Ben? There's plenty of room."

The man was mad, thought Harlan, so if handled right—

But there was no time. Big Andy's ax rose on the instant; Harlan reached for his gun; and another gun went off behind him, deafening him with its reverberations among the rocks.

He turned, and there was Lord not more than thirty feet away.

He turned back, and Big Andy was gone. He could not look down for a minute; then he did, and saw the swollen body wedged between two deep shelves of granite that came within eighteen inches of meeting across the chasm. It was the narrowest place, and Big Andy had pitched into it headfirst. There was no movement in his legs, no sign of life at all.

Harlan, feeling faint, was glad to hear Lord's voice in his ear. "Sit down, Cox. Sit down and put your head between your knees. You'll be all right."

Lord was there beside him, looking at what was left of Big Andy. "I wondered about you, and came back. Good thing I did."

"Yes, sir." Harlan, obediently seated, his head hanging, could scarcely hear his own words. "A mighty good thing. You saved my life."

"It was yours or his, and I don't think his would have been worth much to him."

"No, it wouldn't."

"I heard what he said. The case is closed, or will be when we get them out of here."

"Them?"

"We'll try for both. It can't be bottomless."

"They used to say it was."

"The only bottomless thing, my boy, is the so-called human mind. Can you walk now?"

He could, so they went down the path together.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CHARLES NORMAN**

TITLE: ***The Final Touch***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALES: Dobbs Ferry and New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The story of one of the strangest crimes ever to appear in fiction, and of the criminal who could commit the crime better than anyone else living . . .*

THE TELEPHONE RANG—IT WAS IN the kitchen. The children came running, looking grubby and anxious.

"It's for you," his wife said, popping her head into the living room.

Joel Barkley got up from the stuffed chair on which a single soiled piece of stuffing lay like a Santa Claus beard. "Yes," he said into the phone, "on the 10:15." And he hung up. His wife and children watched him expectantly.

He was a thin, frail, wasted man about forty. He might have been handsome once. Now his clothes hung on him as on a rack, the sleeves of his jacket too short, the trousers baggy. His blond hair lay flat and dank on his skull. There was a mustache, too, but it no longer bristled; it hung down at each end like a beaten dog's tail. He had slender hands with strong wrists.

"I've got a job," he said.

The children stared at him for a moment, then ran, shouting all the way, to their play room.

His wife's look, as on all these occasions, was full of layers—of relief, perhaps, at the prospect of some money; resentment held in check, and a slowly matured doubt. It was the doubt in her look that he disliked most. She was bigger and healthier than he was, but she had never been pretty, and the years with him had made her a sloven. There was the house to look after, there were the children—and nothing to dress for even if there had been dresses.

She looked at her husband with the look that was full of layers, see-

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ing the artist and bohemian she had once marked for her own in Greenwich Village, and married, and after a succession of hovels—his—had brought to Dobbs Ferry, to the house that had been her uncle's, a widower, deceased.

Here, she had been certain, Joel would paint the pictures he was always talking about—the great canvases which dealers and the trustees of museums would consider it a privilege to come out to see. It was a rundown house, in a neighborhood which might have been pretty as well as rural once, perhaps about the time her uncle had brought his bride there.

The house had run down with their own fortunes. The pictures were never painted, although money badly needed for food and clothes had gone into prime materials—linen canvases now sagging and spotted with mould, and tubes of paint stuck together and hardening.

But there was still one piece of equipment which Joel Barkley kept in good repair. It was a small paint box with a single brush in it, size No. 2, long and thin; two tubes of paint; two small bottles; a flat metal cup; and a clean white rag. The bottles contained turpentine and linseed oil.

This box he now brought to the kitchen, placing it on the table without a jolt. From a hook on the wall he took his hat and overcoat and, holding the flat paint box as though it had been a brief case, looked at his wife.

She knew what his look meant. From a cookie jar on the shelf she carefully counted out his train fare, neither more nor less, and gave it to him without a word. At a window in the back the children watched him go down the gravel path.

Joel Barkley was not aware of this. He was conscious, instead, of the peering eyes of neighbors. He was glad that the neighbors were peering at him as he swung down the path and the street with his paint box firmly grasped, headed for the station. A trip to town was still something; and his trip, they would know, meant a commission. The neighbors did not, of course, know what kind of commission came to him periodically, and he had no intention of telling them. It was a painting commission—that was enough for them. Thus was maintained, for them and for himself, the fiction of an artist in their midst—or so he hoped. The rest couldn't be helped. That's the way things were. He felt a surge of self-pity. All right then, this is what he had to do.

As it happened, it was one thing he could do really well—do better than anyone else living, when it came to that. A residue of wry humor in him made him smile to himself at the correlative thought. In the train he sat with the paint box on his lap, his hands reposing

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as though in prayer on the smooth wood.

And he thought again of the miraculous palette from which so many masterpieces had come—the paintings based on the colors that had come from Fragonard and Rubens, and through Rubens from the Venetians—blue and ivory flowing like twilight into a softly glowing green which might have been mixed with ground pearls or light itself; the bolstering reds, yellows, and browns; and emerald, ruby, or rose melting into violet.

How well he knew that palette, and all the arrangements that had come from it—sensuous, forever fresh, landscapes of perpetual spring, and flesh forever young. But he had never been asked to show what he could do with it; his was merely the final touch. He was a master at it. Nobody could deny that.

Emerging from Grand Central, he made his way on foot up Lexington Avenue to the fifties where he entered a dingy brownstone and ascended to the first floor. He was expected. Hardly had he reached the landing when a door was opened for him, and he came—as he had hoped and expected—into a circle of smiling, welcoming faces.

He shook hands all around, holding the paint box importantly in his left hand, then laid it carefully on a small table beside an easel on which rested a huge canvas in a massive gold frame. Still under the expectant gaze of his welcomers, he removed his hat, coat, and jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and opened the box. He turned, now, to look at the painting on the easel.

It was impressive. Light was everywhere, light was a texture. In that light, partly in water that was like the light itself, three bathers stood, rosily nubile. No one, Joel Barkley thought, could mistake that canvas for anyone else's; and yet, even as he thought this, he felt, for all its impressiveness, that something was lacking. And it was not what he had come to do.

The light, which should have been mixed with the water and the weeds and the sky and the flesh, was not a part of them, but superimposed. He could have done it better, he thought. He smiled wryly at the cunning, expectant faces watching him.

"Not bad," he said, and they all smiled back. He wondered idly who had painted it—perhaps several artists; one for the figures, one for the water and sky, a third for the light. The light-bringer. He had never met another artist there. He shrugged—it was not his concern, and they did not like questions.

Joel Barkley mixed a drop of turpentine and another of linseed oil in the metal cup, and then a minute quantity of burnt siena and black from the tubes, and began to work. Once or twice he stepped backward, professionally, but it

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was all a pose, an act. He could have done it blindfolded.

It was only the first letter that ever gave him any trouble. Should it be plain, with the loop at the top completely closed, the whole formed by a single, unbroken flow of the brush? Or should it be two separate strokes, the upright bar ornamented by a tongue-like curve to the left, with the loop curving inward to the right and center of the bar? He had decided on the latter —the first was too simple, it was too quickly over.

Squinting at the massive, ornate letter he saw that it had the properly tilted look everyone would recognize. He dipped his brush in the paint and resumed. In a moment it was over. *Renoir,* it read. It was unmistakable. He straightened up and wiped the brush.

Not a word was said. It was lunchtime, and he was hungry. One of the men handed him an envelope. He did not even bother to see what was in it; it was always the same. The men were standing before the picture, already estimating in their minds, he supposed, what the traffic would bear. He left without handshakes; not one head turned as he shut the door.

Two hours later he was home. Swinging the paint box importantly he walked slowly up the gravel path to his house. His wife was in the kitchen. "Well?" her layered look seemed to say, and he drew forth the envelope and gave it to her. She counted five crisp ten-dollar bills. Thrusting them into her apron pocket she turned to the stove.

"I've kept a plate hot for you."

"I'm not hungry," he said.

He went into the living room and sat down in the stuffed chair, the paint box on his lap. He was still wearing his hat and coat. And he began to cry.

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Mystery reprints are becoming fewer and more expensive these days, but are mostly of strikingly high quality. Notice especially the books by two of EQMM's consistent top contributors: Charlotte Armstrong's THE UNSUSPECTED (1946) and INCIDENT AT A CORNER (1959) in one volume (Ace G-501, 50¢) and Philip MacDonald's classic WARRANT FOR X (1938), either alone (Dell F184, 50¢) or with two other fine old MacDonalds in TRIPLE JEOPARDY (Crime Club, $4.50).

★★★★ **THE SCARLET BOY, by Arthur Calder-Marshall** (Harper, $3.95)
Not only a strong suspense story, but one of the best full-length novels of haunting and exorcism ever written.

★★★ **THE SPOILT KILL, by Mary Kelly** (British Book Centre, $3.25)
Unusual in its firm plotting, its evocation of the Staffordshire pottery industry, and its sensitive study of the detective as a man.

★★★ **BUMP IN THE NIGHT, by Colin Watson** (Walker, $2.95)
English writer new to U.S. reveals fresh ingenuity and delightful sense of absurdity.

★★★ **THE NAME OF THE GAME IS DEATH, by Dan J. Marlowe** (Gold Medal s1184, 35¢)
Chilling and uncompromising study of a hardheaded killer from his own amoral viewpoint.

★★★ **THE SKIN GAME, by Frank Bonham** (Gold Medal s1178, 35¢)
Story of authentic *Black Mask* hardness and acuteness, with a parole officer as detective.

Students of factual crime can also rejoice in the quality of current reprints. John Dickson Carr's THE MURDER OF SIR EDMUND GODFREY (1936; Dolphin C369, 95¢) is, bluntly, a masterpiece; and Gold Medal is reissuing its excellent Classic Murder Trials (50¢ each), starting with THE GIRL IN LOVER'S LANE (Hall-Mills) by Charles Boswell and Lewis Thompson (d1187) and THE GIRL IN THE HOUSE OF HATE (Lizzie Borden) by Charles and Louise Samuels (d1188).

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Some critics are predicting that Jorge Luis Borges will become one of the "big" literary names of our time . . .

THE TWO KINGS AND THE TWO LABYRINTHS

by JORGE LUIS BORGES

(translated by Donald A. Yates)

MEN WHOSE WORD MAY BE TRUSTED (BUT ALLAH KNOWS MORE) RELATE that in the early days there was a king of the islands of Babylon who gathered together his architects and magicians and ordered them to construct a labyrinth so perplexing and so subtle that prudent men would not venture to set foot in it, and those that did would become lost. This creation was a scandal, for confusion and marvel are properly operations of God and not of man.

With the passing of time there came to his court a king of the Arabs, and the king of Babylon, in order to make fun of his guest's simplicity, had him enter the labyrinth, where he wandered ashamed and humiliated until the setting of the sun. Then the king of Arabia begged divine succor and came across the exit. His lips uttered no complaint, but he said to the king of Babylon that in Arabia he had a better labyrinth and that, God willing, he would make it known to him one day.

Then the king returned to Arabia, called together his captains and his lords, and overran the kingdom of Babylon with such bright fortune that he destroyed its palaces, defeated its peoples, and captured the king himself. He tied the king of Babylon on the back of a swift camel and led him to the desert.

They rode for three days at the end of which he said to the captive, "Oh, King of Time and Substance and Great Presence of the Century, in Babylon it was your will to lose me in a labyrinth of bronze with many stairs and doors and walls; now the Almighty has seen fit that I should show you mine own labyrinth, in which there are no stairs for you to climb, nor fatiguing corridors for you to explore, nor walls to block your way."

Then the king of Arabia untied the cords and abandoned the king of Babylon in the middle of the desert, where he died of hunger and thirst.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.**
TITLE:	***Grandfather and the Great Horseshoe Mystery***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Grandfather Rastin
LOCALE:	Borgville, Michigan
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Is it really possible that the present generation never heard of pitching horseshoes? Your Editors feel as old as Grandfather Rastin, the octogenarian detective. An amusing and clever mystery . . .*

BORGVILLE'S NEW PARK WAS DEDICATED on the Fourth of July with an all-day community picnic. Nearly all of Borgville's 800 people attended, and then there were farmers from miles around, and businessmen from neighboring towns, and I guess most of the politicians from four counties. The Park Committee tried to get the Governor of Michigan to give the dedication speech, but he was already committed to talk somewhere else. So they finally settled for Mr. Dombrowski, who is our County Drain Commissioner.

It was an important day for Borgville, and my family did all right, too. I won a white ribbon in the 100-yard dash for boys 15-18, and Mom took the red ribbon in the rolling pin throwing contest—Mrs. Pobloch beat her by ten feet—and even my Grandfather Rastin got a ribbon. Mr. Hanson awarded it to him before the field events started. He said there weren't any events for men over 80, but if there were he was sure Grandfather would win them all, so the committee had voted to give him the first blue ribbon. Grandfather said afterward that the real reason was to get him to stay on the sidelines and give the younger men a chance.

It was a busy day for me, and I didn't see much of Grandfather until late in the afternoon, when he

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came over to watch me being eliminated in the tennis tournament.

"Tennis," he said afterward, "isn't much of a game."

I'd had my tennis racket for only three weeks, but I thought tennis was a fine game.

"I like games of skill," Grandfather said. "There isn't much skill called for to hit a ball with a bat that big."

I tried to explain that it was where the ball went that counted, but Grandfather wouldn't have any of that. "How can you miss," he asked, "when you use a bat the size of a snowshoe?"

"What did you play when you were young?" I asked him.

"Horseshoes," Grandfather said. "Now there's a real game of skill."

"Especially for horses," I said.

Grandfather grabbed my arm and glared at me. "What's wrong with horseshoes?"

It took me a moment to realize that he wasn't joking. "You mean there really is such a game?" I said.

He turned, and hauled me off through the crowd. We upset three picnic baskets and one thermos jug, tipped over a charcoal burner and trompled several small children, but Grandfather didn't stop until he got me over to where the Park Committee was awarding ribbons and stood me up in front of Mr. Hanson.

"Hanson," Grandfather said, "what this park needs is a horseshoes court."

Mr. Hanson stared at us. It took him a little time to get the idea in focus, and then he grinned. "Who'd use it?" he asked.

"Lots of people would," Grandfather told him. "Best game in the world. Just what these kids need. Imagine—Johnny here didn't even know there was such a game!"

The members of the Park Committee were indulging in some head scratching. Probably they had thought of a lot of bright remarks, but they were keeping them in until they figured out whether Grandfather was serious or pulling their legs.

"We have plenty of room for a—what did you call it? —a court?" Mr. Hanson said. "But there wouldn't be any sense in putting one in if it wasn't going to be used. You find a dozen people who want to pitch horseshoes, and *then* we'll consider it."

"Easy," Grandfather said.

He got a piece of paper from somewhere and signed his name at the top. Then he went looking for horseshoe pitchers. When I saw him again, a couple of hours later, he was so mad he'd stopped wearing his blue ribbon. He had just two names on his paper—his and Nat Barlow's—and I knew that Nat didn't want to pitch horseshoes. Nat's a frail old man in his seventies, and he doesn't look as if he could even lift a horseshoe. He just signed because Grandfather asked him to.

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I offered to sign the paper myself, so there would be three names, but Grandfather wouldn't let me. He was so disgusted that he went home before the fireworks started, and he spent all of the next day up in his bedroom, rocking in his rocking chair and snarling when anyone tried to talk to him.

I'd begun to feel curious about this game of horseshoes that Grandfather thought was so wonderful. I looked it up in the books we have at home, but none of them seemed to know that horseshoes were anything but footwear for horses. That would have been the end of it if I hadn't chanced to be looking through a mail-order catalogue a week later, and darned if it didn't have a game of horseshoes listed!

So I drew $8 out of savings account and sent off the order. I figured on giving it to Grandfather for a birthday present in September, but when it came I couldn't wait. I wrapped it up in some paper left over from Christmas, and put it at Grandfather's place at the breakfast table.

"It's a late Christmas present," I said, "or an early birthday present. Take your pick."

Grandfather made a face at me. He's always tickled pink to get presents, but he doesn't like to show it. It took him about ten minutes to get all the paper off, and folded up for next Christmas, and all the time he was fidgeting with curiosity because the package was so heavy. Finally he got the box open, and there they were—two red horseshoes and two blue horseshoes and two stakes.

"Well!" Grandfather said. I'd never seen him look so pleased.

Mom throw up her hands. "Keep those things out of my garden."

"We'll set it up out by the alley," Grandfather said. "Right after breakfast. It's a fine game for character building."

Mom winked at me. "Isn't it a little late for you to start building your character?"

"I was referring to Johnny," Grandfather snapped, "and you know it."

So we drove in the stakes out by the alley, where the grass is pretty thin anyway, and I had my first lesson in pitching horseshoes.

In case you've never pitched horseshoes, I'll tell you a little about the game. The idea is to stand at one stake, which is located at what looks like a country mile from the other, and throw a horseshoe so it comes down around the other stake. This is called a ringer. A horseshoe is something smaller than a hoola hoop, and more than a mite heavier, and after a morning of throwing horseshoes back and forth there were blisters on two of my fingers, and muscles I never knew I had were sending up distress signals.

"I've had enough," I said, when the biggest blister broke.

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"Bah!" Grandfather said. He cut loose with another horseshoe, and it floated through the air like a feather, flat and turning slowly, and came down with a *clump* right around the stake. "Bah. You kids are all ice cream and soda pop."

"We sure are," I said, rubbing my arm.

I went in to get my blisters patched up, but Grandfather stayed out there until lunch time, throwing those horseshoes back and forth. After lunch he asked, "Ready to try again?" I held up my bandaged fingers, and he let out a snort and walked off toward Main Street.

Most afternoons, when the weather is nice, Grandfather goes uptown and borrows the morning paper from Mr. Snubbs, who owns Snubbs Hardware Store. Then he sits on the bench in front of Jake Palmer's Barber Shop and reads it. That afternoon he didn't bother with the paper. He was back twenty minutes later, bringing Nat Barlow with him.

The two of them went out to the alley, and I hurried after them, mainly because the spectacle of Nat Barlow throwing a horseshoe—or anything else—was one I didn't want to miss.

"You first," Grandfather said.

Nat picked up a red horseshoe, closed his eyes, and let fly. The horseshoe landed in the middle of the alley, rolled in a big circle all the way to the stake, and plopped down there as pretty as you please.

Nat jumped up and down and clapped his hands. "Ringer!" he yelled.

Grandfather squinted at the far stake. "It isn't," he said. "Not quite."

"Is too," Nat said.

The three of us walked down to the other stake. Grandfather proceeded to demonstrate scientifically that the horseshoe wasn't quite far enough around the stake to be a ringer. Nat waved his arms and shouted that Grandfather was trying to cheat him. Grandfather explained again, being very patient with Nat, but there is something about Grandfather being patient that would make an angel swear.

Nat stomped his foot a couple of times, then threw away his other red horseshoe, making a much better toss than he had with the first one. It sailed clear across the alley and through the door of Merton's barn.

Nat went back uptown by way of the alley, and Grandfather returned to the house, muttering to himself. I went over to the barn to retrieve Nat's red horseshoe.

Merton's barn is really a big old stable that the Mertons built to keep their horses in back about 1920, when Mr. Merton's old man thought the future of the automobile didn't look very bright. The stalls were knocked out long ago, but it still has the loft where hay and feed were kept. For years the Mertons used it for storage, until

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the place got so crowded with junk that the door couldn't have been closed if there'd been any door.

Just a week before I got the horseshoes, Mr. Merton had the old stable cleaned out and everything carted away. Now he uses it as a garage for that funny little foreign car he has, which is, as Grandfather says, a little like keeping a bean in a bushel basket. Fortunately, the car wasn't there when Nat threw the horseshoe.

I collected all four horseshoes, and made myself four ringers while standing two and a half feet from the stake, and then I went in to see what Grandfather was doing.

"Imagine that," he said to me. "A grown man behaving like a spoiled child."

"It was pretty close to a ringer," I said. "Why didn't you let him have it?"

"What's the point in a game's having rules if you don't stick to them?" Grandfather asked.

I didn't have any answer to that, so I said, "Now you've got no one to play with."

"How's the hand?"

"Not so good," I said.

"Soda pop," Grandfather said. "And ice cream." He went up to his room, and I heard his rocking chair start up again.

A couple of hours later Mr. Snubbs came by with the morning paper. "Thought maybe your Grandfather was sick and couldn't come after it," he said.

"He's not exactly sick," I said. "He's just mad."

"Amounts to the same thing," Mr. Snubbs said.

Grandfather called down from the head of the stairs. "That you, Snubbs? How about a game of horseshoes?"

Mr. Snubbs started to back away. "That's all right for a youngster like you, but me—I'm too old for such carrying on. Why, I haven't pitched horseshoes since . . ."

He never got to finish. Grandfather was down the stairs and had him by the arm, marching him through the house and out the back door. I was curious to know if Mr. Snubbs could do as well with his eyes closed as Nat Barlow had, but I never found out. Because when we got out to the alley there weren't any horseshoes.

"What did you do with them, Johnny?" Grandfather asked.

"I left them right there on that stake," I said.

"They didn't walk away by themselves," Grandfather said.

Mr. Snubbs giggled. "Maybe some horse came along and liked them."

Grandfather didn't answer. He stood there for all of a minute, thinking, then he headed for the house at a full gallop.

Mr. Snubbs winked at me. "I think I'll go back to the store. Let me know if he finds them—so I can keep away from here."

When I got to the house Grand-

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father was shouting at the telephone. "I want to see Sheriff Pilkins. Right away!"

The Sheriff wasn't in. Grandfather told the Deputy just what he thought of a Sheriff that wasn't around when he was needed, and hung up grumbling. But before he got one good grumble rounded off, the Sheriff came walking up the front steps.

Grandfather and Sheriff Pilkins are not what one would call close friends, and this is only partly because Sheriff Pilkins is a Republican, and Grandfather would be Borgville Democratic Chairman if there were enough Democrats in Borgville to need a chairman. I guess the main reason is that they just don't like each other. But Grandfather has helped the Sheriff out quite a few times, and made a monkey out of him more than once, and the Sheriff thought Grandfather wouldn't be telephoning him if it wasn't something important. He was all excited and out of breath. "What have you got?" he asked.

"It's what I haven't got," Grandfather said. "Someone just stole my horseshoes."

Sheriff Pilkins collapsed onto the sofa. "Would you mind saying that again?"

"You hard of hearing, or something? Someone stole my horseshoes."

The Sheriff buried his face in his hands. "All right," he said, talking through his fingers. "Someone stole your horseshoes. Any suspects?"

"No," Grandfather said. "I know darned well it was Nat Barlow."

"I doubt it," the Sheriff said. "I saw Nat just now. He's over on Main Street sitting in front of the barber shop, and if he has horseshoes in his pockets they don't show. Who else?"

"Nat stole them and hid them somewhere, just to be spiteful," Grandfather said.

"I doubt it, but I'll have a look. Where were they?"

We went out to the alley, and I showed the Sheriff where I'd left the horseshoes.

"They shouldn't be hard to trace," the Sheriff said. "They're the only playing horseshoes around here. All we have to do is wait until we see someone pitching horseshoes, and ask where they got them."

"There won't be anyone pitching horseshoes," Grandfather said. "Nat's hid them somewhere."

The Sheriff looked the ground over some, and then he grinned. "Say—you don't suppose a horse came down the alley . . ."

"Shut up!" Grandfather shouted.

"Just a moment," the Sheriff said. He walked all the way to the end of the alley, where it meets the alley that runs behind the stores on Main Street. When he came back he looked excited.

"There was a theft uptown this

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afternoon," he said. "Jim Higgins was making up the Variety Store's bank deposit, and he was called to the telephone, and while he was talking someone came in the back door and stole his moneybag. That's where I was when they told me you called. I thought maybe you had a line on who took it, so I came right over."

"Don't know a thing about it," Grandfather said.

"Well—this alley connects with the alley that runs behind the Variety Store. I was thinking that the thief could easily have come up this way after he took the money, and he stole your horseshoes, too. It sometimes happens that when someone steals something and wants to hide it he'll grab anything he can lay his hands on that's heavy."

Grandfather turned and stared at the Sheriff. "Why?"

"Why, to make it sink! Then he can toss his loot in the water somewhere, and fish it out when the heat's off."

"Is that a fact?"

"Sure. I've read about it lots of times."

"How much money was in the bag?" Grandfather asked.

"Quite a lot. Nearly a hundred dollars worth of change. Higgins hadn't gotten around to his paper money, which is a lucky thing for him."

"You don't say," Grandfather said.

I knew what was coming. That is, I knew *something* was coming. It always does when Grandfather sounds so meek and innocent-like.

He went on, "Then maybe you wouldn't mind explaining why the thief needed my four horseshoes *to sink a bagful of metal money!*"

The Sheriff's face started getting red. Grandfather kept glaring at him until the Sheriff looked the other way.

"No wonder crime runs rampant in this county," Grandfather said, and walked away.

We met the Sheriff uptown that evening, when I was taking Grandfather's evening walk with him.

"I talked with Nat," Sheriff Pilkins said. "Nat claims he doesn't know anything about your horseshoes."

"If he says he doesn't, then he doesn't," Grandfather said. "I've never known Nat to tell a lie."

"Probably some kids ran off with them," the Sheriff said.

"They knew they'd be perfectly safe," Grandfather said, "considering who's the sheriff round here."

Sheriff Pilkins started to sputter, and Grandfather walked away so fast I had to run to keep up with him. "If I thought it would do any good," Grandfather said, "I'd threaten not to vote for him. But he knows I've never voted for him yet, and I wouldn't vote for him even if he found the horseshoes. He knows that, too."

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"So what are you going to do?" I asked.

"I guess I'll have to find them myself."

He went home and rocked on it. He was rocking when I went to sleep, and he was rocking when I woke up. He was mad enough to rock all night, and maybe he did, but as far as his horseshoes were concerned this particular rocking was wasted mileage.

"Did you think of anything?" I asked him at the breakfast table.

"No," he said, and right after breakfast he went back up to his rocking chair.

I started for the park to see if I could find someone to play tennis with—and as I turned into the alley there on the first stake were four horseshoes, two red and two blue!

I turned and ran back to the house.

"You can stop rocking," I told Grandfather. "Whoever took your horseshoes brought them back."

Grandfather didn't say anything until he'd worked up a little more speed. Then he asked, "Are you joking?"

"Nope," I said. "They're right there on the stake where I first left them."

Grandfather rocked a little faster. "This," he said, "is ridiculous. Bringing them back makes even less sense than taking them in the first place!"

"The Sheriff stirred up a lot of dust," I said. "Maybe the thief got scared."

"Pilkins wouldn't scare a thief," Grandfather said, "but he might make him laugh himself to death. How's the hand?"

"Some better," I said.

So we spent the morning pitching horseshoes.

Sheriff Pilkins stopped by at ten o'clock—to report progress, I suppose—and when he saw us playing with the horseshoes he stood there watching for a long time while his face took on some colors that made me wonder if his blood circulation had a safety valve built in anywhere.

"So your horseshoes were stolen," he said finally.

Grandfather took aim and let fly with another ringer. "Fortunately," he said, "we didn't have to depend on you to get them back."

"Who had them?"

"Don't know," Grandfather said.

"Then how'd you get them back?"

"Whoever took them brought them back."

"Did you get a look at him?"

Grandfather shook his head.

"If you hadn't been in such an all-fired rush to start using them, we could have checked for fingerprints."

"That so?" Grandfather said. "What would you charge him with if you caught him? Borrowing my horseshoes overnight?"

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Sheriff Pilkins considered this. "It wouldn't make much of a case," he admitted. "But you might have thought about that before you kicked up so much fuss about them."

"I wasn't after blood," Grandfather said. "All I wanted was my horseshoes back."

"All right," the Sheriff said. "You got them back. And the next time you have a dastardly crime to report, don't."

The Sheriff left, and Grandfather went over and sat down on a cement block that Merton had saved out of the junk that was in his barn. "Johnny," he said, "there's something mightly queer going on."

"I can't see that there's anything to worry about," I said. "We have the horseshoes back, and I won't make the mistake of leaving them out here again."

Grandfather didn't say anything.

"It's too bad you didn't like tennis," I said. "If I'd gotten you a tennis racket we wouldn't have had all this trouble."

"If you'd eat more potatoes and less ice cream," Grandfather said, "you'd be able to pitch a shoe within ten feet of the stake."

He got up and walked down the alley. Then he came back and stood in the doorway of Merton's barn, looking the place over. "It was Jerry Stark, wasn't it, that Merton had cleaning this place out?"

"Sure," I said. "He worked on it two days."

"Jerry still living over at the old Hurth place?"

"If Old Man Hurth hasn't thrown him out, he is."

"Tonight," Grandfather said, "I'll have a job for you."

He went back to the house. I followed him, and this time I brought the horseshoes along, and left them on the back porch.

That night I got out to the Hurth place just before midnight. It's an old wreck of a house that stands a couple of miles north of town. It had been boarded up for several years when Jerry Stark rented it. Grandfather said it wasn't fit for human habitation, but I guess Jerry wasn't in any position to be particular.

Jerry had had a pretty good job in a factory in Wiston; and then the factory moved to Tennessee or Arkansas or somewhere and left Jerry with a wife and three small kids and no job. He worked at what he could find, which wasn't much, and when the mortgage was foreclosed on the house he was buying in Wiston, he rented the Hurth place because it came cheap. Only the word I got was that he wasn't even able to pay that rent, and Old Man Hurth was talking about throwing him out.

I left our car parked down the road and then tiptoed through a couple of acres of weeds to get to the front door. There was a light in one of the rooms, though not

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much of a light. Old Man Hurth had never put electricity into the house, so it had to be a candle or a kerosene lamp. There was a baby crying, and as I stood by the porch listening, one of the older kids began to chime in.

I felt plenty sorry for Jerry. It would have made sense to me if Grandfather had suggested that he was the Variety Store thief. Not that he'd ever done anything dishonest, but he sure needed the money. What I couldn't understand was how the horseshoes came into it.

But they were Grandfather's horseshoes, and all I could do was hope he knew what he was doing. I had the horseshoes wrapped in a burlap bag, so they wouldn't make any noise, and I took them out one at a time and laid them in a row at the edge of the sagging old porch. Then I beat it home.

Grandfather was waiting up for me, and I told him the mission was accomplished.

He grunted. "Anyone see you?"

"I don't think so," I said.

"All right. Go to bed."

"I'd still like to know why you're giving your horseshoes away," I said. "Even if Jerry isn't working, he probably doesn't have time to waste pitching horseshoes. And if he has, he'll need the stakes to go with them."

Grandfather grinned at me. "Go to bed," he said. So I went to bed.

I slept late the next morning, and Mom finally came in to wake me up at 9:30, wanting to know what Grandfather and I had been up to the night before.

"Did you ask him?" I said.

"Yes," she said. "He said I'd have to ask you."

"He told me not to tell anyone," I said. We laughed. "What's he doing this morning?" I asked her.

"He's out pitching horseshoes."

"What?"

"I said he's out . . ."

I tore downstairs, barefoot and in my pajamas, and ran out into the back yard. Sure enough, Grandfather was out there pitching with all four horseshoes.

"Where did you get them?" I asked.

"Someone left them on the stake," Grandfather said. "Just like he did yesterday."

"Then it must have been Jerry that took them."

Grandfather missed a ringer by a hair and muttered something under his breath. "Do you think so?" he said.

"What are you going to do? Tell the Sheriff?"

Grandfather shook his head. "Tonight," he said, "I'll have a job for you."

It was the same job. I took the four horseshoes back to the Hurth place and left them in a row on the front porch. Grandfather didn't even bother to wait up for me that second night, and I didn't bother to

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wait for him the next morning. I was the first one out of bed, and I pulled on my clothes and ran down to look for horseshoes.

There weren't any.

Grandfather was just getting up when I got back to the house. "If you're planning on playing horseshoes this morning," I said, "don't. He's decided that you must want him to keep them."

"Good," Grandfather said, and went down to breakfast whistling.

It was too much for me, so right after breakfast I went over to the park to play tennis. I came home at 11:30, dead tired, and found Grandfather out by the alley pitching horseshoes with Jerry Stark.

"We're waiting for you, Johnny, Grandfather said. "Take the car and help Jerry move."

"Move where?" I asked.

"To the Ashley farm," Grandfather said. "Jerry's going to work for Ashley."

"Not right now, he isn't," I said. "I'm hungry."

"Right after lunch then."

Mom fixed an early lunch for the three of us, and then I drove Jerry back to the Hurth place. He didn't have much to say along the way, except that he thought Grandfather was a great guy.

"He is that," I said. "But don't ever make the mistake of trying to figure him out."

"I asked Ashley for that job maybe a dozen times," Jerry said. "No soap. Your Grandfather makes one telephone call, and the job's mine."

"I didn't know you knew anything about farming," I said.

"I don't," Jerry said. "That's why Ashley wouldn't hire me."

Jerry's wife fell all over him when he told her the good news. We loaded her and the kids into the car, and tossed as much stuff as we could on top of them, and drove over to the Ashley farm. Ashley has a little cottage he once built for one of his sons, and the Starks took over. It isn't much of a house, but compared with the place they had been living in it was a palace.

Jerry borrowed Ashley's pickup truck, and the two of us got everything moved in a hurry. There wasn't much to move. Then Old Man Ashley started giving Jerry a lesson in driving a tractor, and I headed back to town.

I found Grandfather in front of Jake Palmer's Barber Shop, reading Mr. Snubbs's morning paper, and keeping one ear on the conversation of the men standing around, just in case they needed straightening out about anything. It wasn't the proper time to be asking questions, so I went on home. Grandfather had left the horseshoes on one of the stakes when he finished using them, so I put them on the back porch. I wasn't going to have *that* business starting all over again.

Grandfather wasn't much interested in talking about horseshoes when he came home. He had another job to be done that night, and

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he wouldn't talk about that, either. He did it himself, walking off toward town just after dark, and coming back an hour later looking as smug as a dog that's just had puppies.

But he still wouldn't tell me a thing. I went and checked the horseshoes, just in case, but they were on the back porch just where I'd left them.

Grandfather and I were pitching horseshoes when Sheriff Pilkins came by the next morning.

"I've just seen Higgins," the Sheriff said. "He says the stolen money was returned to him during the night. Someone dropped it in through the mail slot."

"Nice of you to let me know," Grandfather said. "Though I imagine I would have heard about it sooner or later. Or did you think maybe I could tell you who returned it?"

"I don't know what to think," the Sheriff said. "Your horseshoes are stolen, and then someone brings them back, no questions asked. Higgins' money is stolen, and then comes back anonymously. Without a penny missing. It doesn't make any sense to me."

"At least there are two crimes you don't have to solve."

"Look here," Sheriff Pilkins said. "Just because the stolen goods was returned don't mean there's no crime to solve. And I aim to solve it. The whole business looks screwy, and it wouldn't surprise me if you and Higgins cooked it up just to pull my leg."

Grandfather took the time to pitch a horseshoe. He missed a ringer—even missed a leaner. "What's screwy about it?" he asked. "It wouldn't be the first time a thief's conscience bothered him."

"It takes more than a conscience to stuff a bag of money through a mail slot. I checked. He must have returned it one coin at a time."

"Maybe he did," Grandfather said. "What did Higgins say?"

"He didn't say anything. He just grinned at me."

"That surprises me."

"It does?"

"It sure does," Grandfather said. "I'm surprised he didn't laugh himself silly."

Grandfather turned around and pitched the other horseshoe. A ringer. We walked down to the other stake, and when we turned around Sheriff Pilkins was gone.

"It's time you let me know what's going on," I said. "I've got part of it figured out. Jerry Stark took the money, and you talked him into returning it and got him a job. Right?"

"Right," Grandfather said. "Only I didn't have to talk him into returning it. He was glad to return it. He'd spent ten dollars for groceries, and I loaned him that so he could return all of it. It's a sad thing when a man has to steal to feed his family. But he'll be all

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right, now. He'll work his head off for Ashley."

"Fine," I said. "That settles everything except what the horseshoes had to do with it."

"Come here," Grandfather said. We walked over to the door of Merton's barn. He pointed. "See that?"

It was dark in the back part of the barn, but finally I made out what he was pointing at. It was a rope, dangling down from the opening to the loft.

"Sure," I said. "There's a pulley up at the roof, and Jerry was using that last week to lower stuff down out of there."

"Still need an explanation?"

"I don't see . . ."

"Look, boy. Jerry was making his rounds asking people for work. He walked through the back door of the Variety Store. Higgins wasn't in the back room, and there was the bag of money. Jerry hadn't earned a penny for a long time, and his family didn't have a thing to eat in the house. So he took the money and ran out and down the alley.

"But it was broad daylight, and a hundred dollars in change won't fit into a watch pocket. Jerry had to get rid of the bag right away, and he figured he was as good as caught if anyone saw him with his pockets bulging. He turned up this way, and here was Merton's barn. He knew all about it, from cleaning it out.

"There wasn't a soul around. So he tied the moneybag to one end of the rope and hoisted it up to the loft, but he had a problem keeping it there because there wasn't anything to tie the rope to. He looked across the alley, and saw just what he needed—four horseshoes.

"So he looped the rope around them, piled the loose end on top so they wouldn't be seen, and got out of here. He couldn't have found a safer hiding place for the money anywhere in town, and it was the easiest thing in the world for him to come back after dark, lower the money, and return the horseshoes.

"He thought he'd gotten away with it until the horseshoes turned up on his porch. Then he didn't know what to think. I suppose it was mean of me to scare him that way, but I figured it would be best if he came to me for help, rather than me—what's the matter?"

"But that's just what the Sheriff said!"

"What did the Sheriff say?"

"Why, he said the thief came down this way and stole your horseshoes and . . ."

Grandfather sighed. "That's the trouble with Pilkins. Even when he does get a good idea he gives it such an idiotic twist that the Almighty Himself couldn't see any merit in it. Horseshoes to sink a bag of coins—phooey! Took me until the next day to remember that weights hold things *up*, as well as *down*. Now let's pitch horseshoes."

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MURDER EAST OF CAIRO

by GORDON GASKILL

(continued from page 63)

I slept late next morning, until the mounting heat woke me up. Under the blazing sun the tent was an oven.

The cars and men were gone. The race to finish the job was so tight that they couldn't lose a single working day. Besides, nobody could get far away; the desert was safe as a jail. They were ordered to return at night, not camp out.

Anne and Hassan Bey were in the mess tent with Jock, finishing breakfast. I told them about the oil drum, and we went out to look at it.

Anne pressed my arm. "Nice going, Sherlock!" she smiled.

Jock was chagrined. "I'll be darned!" he said. "I don't see how anybody could have been watching me, night after night, without my spotting him." Then he nodded slowly. "But maybe he could. I always swing around to the right, to work that computer. I wouldn't normally turn to the left—where he was watching." Then, puzzled, he asked me, "Why would anybody bother?"

I glanced at Hassan Bey, and he nodded imperceptibly. So far we hadn't told anyone else about Zaradin, and Hassan Bey's theory. Now I explained it briefly to Jock. He looked dubious.

"Still," he objected, "what good would it do, even if somebody was spying on me? He'd have to do it for months and months, and then he still couldn't learn much, if anything. And I can't believe he could watch for months without being caught."

Anne nodded agreement. "That's what I've been saying, Jock. It just doesn't make sense—and yet it's pretty clear that somebody *has* been spying on you."

She and Jock kicked it around technically. Sometimes Hassan Bey and I understood what they were talking about, and sometimes they had to stop and put it in A-B-C talk.

The gist of it was this: if a man could, for many months, somehow get a copy of all Jock's weekly reports, and if he then sent them to some trained geologists, they might be able to figure out what E-party was doing.

Theoretically, Anne explained, this was barely possible. "It's inconceivable that a man could stand on that oil drum, night after night, for months and months, copying down hundreds and thousands of figures

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and getting them all correct—and at nighttime, too," she said flatly.

"Let's run over it again," I said wearily after Jock left us to go to work. "If it's plain woman trouble, then it was either Dusty Rhodes or the old Bedouin. But with all this new stuff—"

Hassan Bey nodded. "Do not think," he smiled, "that I am being too patriotic, but if the murder somehow concerns these reports it must be an American, not an Arab. For no Arab has, unfortunately, enough technical training—so far—to know what all these figures would mean. Only an American could do it."

"It might be both," Anne put in. "Both woman trouble, as you put it, and the reports."

"Keep talking," I said.

"Let's suppose," she said, "that there is some spy out here, and that he's an American. Somehow, he has to get his reports back to Bahmaar, and thence to Zaradin. How? There are only two ways: by letter or in person." She smiled wryly. "But this doesn't really get us much forrarder. Who wrote letters regularly to Bahmaar? Dusty Rhodes? Who went into Bahmaar oftenest? Joe Worth. Who knows Arabic and has most contacts with the Arabs there? Jerry Cameron. And don't forget Viola Rhodes has—well, a lot of Arabic contacts, too." As tactful a way as I know of referring to Viola's friendship with the Sheikh's son. "Furthermore, Viola is a woman who likes the kind of luxuries a surveyor couldn't afford. As a go-between she would be paid well."

Hassan Bey spoke up. "This may be pure fantasy," he said apologetically, "but it would be possible that the two Rhodeses—man and wife—were somehow working together. The husband in the desert, spying and sending his reports to his wife in Bahmaar, who could see they got into the right hands."

"Or Cameron could have been working with her," I pointed out.

"Please remember," Hassan Bey interposed, "that there is still no reason to be certain that Cameron was the spy. Perhaps it was he who caught the spy at work, and was killed so he would be silenced forever."

"Then who was it?" I demanded. "Take all of them. I suppose it could have been any of the men, but Anne says they don't know enough for that. They're out of camp all day, and at night they turn in early. Somebody'd notice if one of them went prowling every night. The camp's too small."

"By the same token," she said, "Joe Worth and Jock have the best chance. They're alone in camp all day long, and they seem to be up at all hours at night, too. But Joe—well, he may be a fine mechanic, but I just can't see him knowing enough about geophysics."

"In all the years he's been with the company," I pointed out, "he'd

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be awfully stupid if he didn't pick up a little, just by osmosis."

"It'd have to be a lot," she smiled, "and some terriffic osmosis. True, he does go into town more than anybody else. And that shooting accident . . . Shouldn't we check up on that with the Arab guide? And as Cameron's best friend, Joe would know more than anyone else what Jerry was up to."

"Or Loomis," I said. "He worked with Jerry every day. And he found the body. He was alone with him in the tent for a while. He says he reported it right away. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't."

"The best spy of all, of course," Hassan Bey said apologetically, "would be Mr. Campbell, himself. He knows more than anybody out here and, if I were Zaradin, he is the man I would attempt to bribe."

"But don't forget," Anne said, "that he knows very little, himself. Only one bit a week—as I said, a tiny piece of a giant jigsaw puzzle. And, most of all, don't forget that he was being spied on. He wasn't doing the spying."

I hated to let McLeod know how mixed up we were, but I had promised to radio him that morning. I didn't want to talk in the clear over the wireless; if Zaradin was up to something, he would surely be monitoring E-Camp's transmitter.

So I found Jock and asked him to turn on the garbler. It was a device that scrambled speech so that it made sense only if you had a degarbler on the other end. And in Bahmaar they did.

When I got McLeod on the radiotelephone, I asked him point-blank about Zaradin. He hemmed and hawed and admitted that yes, there were new reports that Zaradin was still not down for the count of ten.

Then I had him switch me over to Personnel, and I asked for complete reports on all the Americans involved. They said they'd have them ready at four that afternoon.

Hassan Bey took over the microphone and got onto one of his assistants in Bahmaar. They talked Arabic so fast that I couldn't keep up with it. It was something about Viola Rhodes and Mohammed al Nasr, the rich merchant who was Zaradin's agent.

As the day dragged along, we hashed over the same old facts. All we got was a couple of new questions to ask them later. First, we wanted to ask Dusty Rhodes if—when he'd been rifling Cameron's folder to find his wife's letters—he had noticed just what the other papers were.

Second, we wanted to ask Jim Loomis how long Cameron had been keeping those copies of his own readings. This was Anne's idea. "Because," she said, "if it's been just a short time, it's absolutely impossible he could have found out how the exploration was going. He'd have to be doing it for months."

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But Hassan Bey shrugged. "I cannot see," he confessed. "why, if Cameron kept his own records, he should bother to spy over the shoulder of Mr. Campbell. And, contrary-wise, if he had access to Mr. Campbell's records why bother keeping his own? Surely Mr. Campbell's are more complete and" —he beamed proudly—"all corrected."

A little after three, the work crews began coming back to camp. Some were ones who had gone out that morning, and we'd already talked to them. Some were ones we hadn't seen, the ones who had camped out last night. We started in the same old routine. I got sick of hearing about the fist fight, about how Cameron wasn't liked.

Anne was outside, but not neglected. The men clustered around her like—in Hassan Bey's phrase—thirsty camels around a well. She saw me watching her, waved, excused herself, and came into the office trailer where we were.

"Behold the desert butterfly!" I said.

She laughed. "A girl with a wooden leg and a wig would be a big success out here. But I wanted to tell you something: one of the men who just came in—that tall one with the sort of yellow hair—said he had something to tell you."

"For the love of Allah," I said. "Get him in here quick. We're not doing much with these other guys."

She caught his eye, beckoned, and he came in. His name was Kronberg, he ran a gravity meter, and he looked embarrassed.

"Maybe it's nothing," he said, "but I figured I ought to tell you. Night before last I was too restless to sleep. I figured a walk might help. So, around midnight, I happened to be going past Cameron's tent—it was the last one in the row as you walk into the desert. It was dark, but there was somebody in there with him. Cameron sounded mean. He said something about 'darn' right I'll see her!' The other guy must have said pipe down. That's all I heard."

"Did you recognize the other man's voice?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No, he was talking too low."

"Any idea who it might have been?"

Kronberg looked out the window. "Well, no, but I figured—well, everybody knew about Cameron and Dusty's wife. And Cameron was due for leave pretty soon. I guess I figured it was Dusty, warning him not to see his wife again. What else?"

Kronberg had no more to add. When he left, Hassan Bey murmured softly, "Again the 'eyes of a woman,' the mysterious *her*. But who?"

"Dusty sounds most likely," I said, "but don't forget there's another 'her.' That Arab girl out here."

"But who would be warning him

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not to see her?" Anne argued. "It wasn't an Arab, or he'd have been speaking in Arabic. So it must have been an American, and—" She stopped suddenly. "And the only American who even knew Cameron'd had that trouble with the Arab girl was Joe Worth. Remember? He said nobody else knew about it, and that Cameron asked him not to tell."

Jock stuck his head in the door. "Sorry to interrupt," he said, "but Bahmaar's on the radio."

Personnel had nothing special on any of the Americans in E-Camp. There was only one curious fact: Personnel reported that two weeks ago Jock Campbell had requested that Dusty Rhodes be transferred out of the desert and back to Bahmaar. Personnel had denied the request, saying that it had no other surveyor on tap, and time was too short to find one.

Jock flushed, made signs to me he would explain when we signed off.

Hassan Bey talked to his Arab source. Again I couldn't understand well, but Hassan's eyebrows got nearer his headdress.

We signed off, and Jock said, embarrassed, "I suppose I ought to have told you about my asking to have Rhodes transferred; but it didn't seem to have any bearing on what happened, and I thought it might embarrass him. You see, he doesn't know about it, so I hope you can see your way clear to keeping it from him."

I nodded. "Sure, unless it's important, Jock."

"It's not," he said. "You see, I'd thought for a long time Dusty ought to be back in town. He's been tense and jumpy. Something was bothering him and I figured it was domestic troubles. He's the only married man out here—with a wife in Bahmaar, that is—and it's no way for a married man to live. Especially with a wife like—" He stopped. "And then, after that fight, I thought it'd be the kindest thing if one of them left, and Dusty was the obvious one. And, frankly, it's easier to replace a surveyor than a magnetometer operator."

Hassan Bey waited until he, Anne, and I were alone. "I have learned one thing," he said then. "Cameron and Mrs. Rhodes were seen twice at the shop of Mohammed al Nasr."

Anne said, "But nearly all Americans go there—it's the best place by far to buy souvenirs. If they were having a romance, it'd be almost natural for them to go into the native part, to get away from other Americans."

Hassan Bey agreed. "Certainly, this opens no locked door. But let us not forget that Mohammed el Nasr is the eyes and ears of Zaradin in Bahmaar!"

Twilight brought its daily relief. Now that the sun was no longer a fiery torch, some Bedouin Arabs came in on their camels, for water.

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I strolled over to watch them. One was the old man whose daughter had been involved with Cameron.

"Sala'am aleikum!" I greeted.

"Aleikum sala'am!" he returned. "And unto you, peace! Is there news of the one who killed the young man?"

I watched him closely. "There is no news," I said.

He sighed. "God reveals all!"

I hunted up Dusty Rhodes and asked him if he'd noticed what the other papers were in Cameron's folder. He was wary, bitter, nervous. "I didn't notice a thing!" he snapped. "I was looking for letters, and nothing else."

Jim Loomis said Cameron had been keeping duplicate copies of his own readings for only about ten days.

"Could he have done it before that, without your knowing it?" Hassan Bey asked.

Loomis grinned. "Impossible! Why?"

We didn't answer.

Anne said, when Loomis had gone, "Then, if he's right, Cameron couldn't have had the slightest idea what was happening—that is, from his own readings. Ten days is nothing at all. Ten months, maybe, but probably not even then, unless he was the world's greatest geophysicist."

Supper was a little brighter than it had been last night, probably because there were more men. Every man in E-party was there.

I waited until after dessert to ask two questions. We had agreed it would be better to ask them when everybody was together. As Hassan Bey had said, "A man's lips may lie, but sometimes his face tells the truth." Particularly when a question was fired like a gun.

When the coffee came, I fired the first barrel.

"Maybe one of you can help us," I said to the whole table. "We've found that Cameron had a lot of papers of some kind." I saw Dusty Rhodes's face flush. "They were in a big folder. Now they're gone. Does anybody have an idea what happened to them?"

I shot a blank. Nobody answered, and nobody's face looked guilty—except that Dusty Rhodes's flush grew deeper.

Then Joe Worth said, slowly, "You're right, though—there's something funny about that. Four or five nights ago he was writing letters. I know that, for sure. And of course the letters didn't go off on yesterday's plane, so they must still be here."

"They're not," I said. The circle of faces stared at me. "So you can see how it looks," I went on. "Cameron is dead. Some papers are missing. Whoever took them had better have a pretty good story."

One man, whose name I forgot, spoke up. "Maybe Cameron hid them."

"Why, and where?" I asked.

"Who knows?" he shrugged. But

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out here it's easy to hide something. Like the Arabs do. Just dig a hole in the sand and bury them. Mark it so's you can find it again—maybe with a rock. The way the sand blows nobody'd ever know where you dug."

I had a swift vision of trying to dig up the whole desert, looking for papers. A needle in a haystack looked like pie.

I fired off my second barrel, hoping it would bring more than the first.

"Another thing," I said. "Somebody was in Cameron's tent, around midnight, the night he was killed." I told them briefly what Kronberg had said he overheard, but I didn't mention his name. Then I repeated the remark he reported to us, that Cameron had said "darned right I'll see her!" I tried not to look at Dusty Rhodes again, though the others glanced furtively at him.

Jock Campbell broke the silence. "I know who the man was," he said, looking faintly distressed. "It was me!" He glanced toward Anne. "I was perhaps a little too much like a mother hen," he said apologetically. "But I knew Cameron was woman-crazy. He'd had that trouble—"

He hesitated, and it was painfully apparent that nobody dared look at Dusty Rhodes now. "I began thinking how Miss Hillman was to be down here a week, alone, and that a man like Cameron—his record—"

He fumbled for the right words and didn't find them. "Anyway," he struggled on. "I decided to tell him not to bother her. I didn't want any trouble."

Anne murmured, greatly embarrassed, "Why does everybody think I need a bodyguard?"

"I know. I'm sorry," Jock said. "Anyway, I didn't do any good. He flared up and said it wasn't any of my business. That I was his boss for work, but his private life was his own. He said he'd darned well see her if he wanted to."

My second shot was a blank, too. Hassan Bey smiled sadly in sympathy. We had banked a lot on the mysterious visitor in the tent.

"Did he seem worried, or anything?" I asked Jock. He was, apparently, the last man to see him alive, except the killer.

"Not a bit, entirely normal," Jock said. "The light was off, of course, but it had been on just a few minutes before. That's why I went so late—I knew he hadn't gone to sleep yet. Of course, he wasn't pleased when he heard what I had to say. Perhaps he was right. Perhaps I was putting an oar in for no reason."

Anne smiled at him. "Thanks, anyway," she said. "If I'd known I'd cause so much trouble, I wouldn't have come down."

"Lady," one of the surveyors beamed, "you're causing us anything but trouble!"

Everybody laughed, and the ten-

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sion broke. We talked no more of the murder.

When I went to my tent I tried to work out the day's impressions. I didn't get anywhere, so finally I pulled the sheet over me and tried to sleep.

Maybe I did; maybe I didn't. Anyway, I seemed to be wide awake when I heard the shot. The first shot. Then came the second, sharp and close. A rifle, I thought, or maybe a pistol.

By the time I got on my slacks and was out of the tent, the camp was humming. Men were running among the tents, with flashlights.

I grabbed the nearest man. "What happened?" I demanded.

"Jock," he panted. "Somebody tried to kill him."

"Is he—?" I began.

"Didn't touch him," he said, "but it was close. Another inch—"

I ran to Jock Campbell's tent. He was sitting on the edge of his bed. Despite his tan, he looked white and shaken. He tried to smile.

"I've been in two wars," he said weakly, "and that's the first shot I ever heard fired in anger." The grin was pretty feeble. "And I must say," he went on, "I hope it's the last."

Hassan Bey came up, and Anne.

Jock said he had finished his work in the office trailer and had just turned in. The light was barely off when the shots came. He pointed out the holes they had made in the side of the tent, where his bed was. They were only an inch or so too high. When she saw them, Anne shuddered.

Jock fingered one of the ragged holes and said, wonderingly, "But who? And why? I didn't think I had an enemy in the world."

Hassan Bey said gravely, "This is hardly the act of a friend."

Jock was collecting himself. "I suppose it must be connected with —the other, with Cameron. But how? Is there something I said tonight?"

Rapidly, in my mind, I went over what Jock had said at supper. There seemed nothing that would be dangerous to Cameron's killer, assuming he was one of the Americans at the table—and what else could we assume?

"There's only one thing I can think of," I said slowly. "The killer knew you were the last one to see Cameron alive—and he didn't know it until tonight. Maybe he's afraid Cameron told you something that would give him away. Something that might seem nothing to you, but that might blow the whole thing up for him."

"But he didn't!" Jock protested. "I've told you exactly what he said."

"The killer might think you were holding something back," I pointed out. "And that it might come to you any minute, and then you'd tell us."

Jock shook his head, puzzled.

Hassan Bey took charge. "For the moment," he said, "we must try to find the gun that fired these

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shots. In such a small camp, surely there are not many guns?"

He was wrong. It seemed every American had a shotgun or a rifle or a pistol. Some had brought them thinking they were going into wild, savage country. Others had sent for them, to use in hunting. Hassan Bey gave strict orders that every man bring in whatever gun he had, immediately.

Meanwhile, he examined the bullet holes. He quickly established, by the way the cloth was torn, which were the entry holes, and which the exit ones. From these he made a rough line of fire and followed it outdoors.

Whoever fired the shots had lain in the shadows not ten yards away. Again, there were no footprints to do us any good; the soft sand held its secrets, and the area had been trampled already by the searching men.

Nor could we ever find the bullets themselves. In the vast desert it was no earthly use even looking for them.

By now the men were bringing in their guns and Hassan Bey was inspecting them. He shrugged. "All are cold, all are clean," he said. "None has been fired recently."

Then Joe Worth came up. "I can't find my rifle," he said, puzzled. "It's gone!"

He said he had a .30-.30 hunting rifle, which he kept, not in his tent, but in the trailer workshop.

"Somebody took it!" he said blankly. "I'd swear it was there tonight before I turned in. Of course," he added, "nothing's locked up. Anybody could come in."

Questioning got us nowhere. Everybody had been asleep; everybody had been wakened by the shots; everybody had seen figures running between the tents, but they were probably seeing one another. One of them, it seemed certain, was the killer, but which one? And what did he do with the gun? That was easy, too easy. He buried it in the sand somewhere, in a hole made beforehand.

Later, much later, we all went to bed again. Jock Campbell scoffed at my suggestion he sleep in the office trailer, with the doors locked.

"If somebody in this camp is bound to kill me," he said shakily, "he could get me there as well as any place else. No, I'll sleep in my own bed."

In the morning we wrestled with the question: What had Jock said that suddenly made the killer decide to close his mouth? Jock tried to remember every word Cameron had said to him, but there was nothing new, nothing at all, that gave us a clue.

Finally, we gave it up. We had no more leads, no more men to question. All the evidence seemed to be in, and still we had come to no conclusions.

Anne had a suggestion. "We still

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haven't been over to the Arab tents," she pointed out. "Not that there's much to learn, I suppose. But we could ask that guide about the shooting accident. And it's just barely possible one of them saw a man standing on that oil drum. It faces that way, you know."

Anyway, it was better than doing nothing, than racing around the same circles. Fortunately, we didn't have to interview each worker. The emir merely called in some messengers and ordered them to ask every Arab.

"Will they really answer honestly?" Anne marveled.

Hassan Bey chuckled. "You do not know how they fear the emir." While no American was permitted to touch, or even curse, an Arab, the emir could do just about anything he liked. Cut off a thief's hand, order lashes, and, if he wanted, even a beheading.

The answers came fast, but they were no help. No Arab had noticed anything about the oil drum. One man, not realizing I understood Arabic, said frankly they paid no attention at all to the goings-on of the Americans; everything we did looked crazy to them.

The guide who had been with Joe Worth and Cameron on their hunting trip turned up, trembling. Yes, he said, he had gone several times as hunting guide with the man who was killed (may he rest with Allah!) and with the man who was the master of the machines. That would be Joe Worth. Yes, the one who was killed spoke a kind of Arabic, but it was not easy to understand. Yes, the two Americans seemed good friends, although with the strangers, who can tell?

Yes, the master of the machines had been a good shot, better than the other. Yes, there had been an accident, but it was nothing—Allah is merciful!

He gave the same details that Joe Worth had explained. We dismissed him. Another blank wall.

We said elaborate goodbyes to the emir, and started walking back to our part of the camp. As we came nearer, the same old sevens and sixes stared us in the face.

From this angle we could clearly see the oil drum up-ended by the office trailer. A face inside the trailer window was turned toward us; probably Jock's. By the workshop trailer, Joe Worth stood in the shade it cast, watching us come nearer. He had some kind of tool in his hand.

"I'm sick of it!" I burst out. "Are we stupid, or have we missed something? It's like trying to put on a car wheel in the dark. The holes are there, and the bolts are there. But it won't fit until you line it up exactly right. Maybe we haven't lined it up right, but where did we go wrong? We've got Cameron keeping a secret copy of his readings which wasn't exactly secret—and everybody swears he couldn't

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tell in that way whether there's oil or not. I don't know, but the experts ought to.

"Then," I went on resentfully, "we have Cameron—it must have been Cameron—spying on Jock, peeking over his shoulder, but for what? To get some figures that—again the experts tell us—aren't any use to anybody. We have somebody shooting at Jock, and again why? No reason!"

Then suddenly I shut up.

Suddenly, somewhere back in my brain, the bolts slipped smoothly into the holes.

Now it fitted. It fitted perfectly.

"Listen!" I said, *"Listen!"* Everyone stopped dead and stared at me. "Listen!" I repeated. "How about this?" And I started talking.

When I'd finished, Anne's face was shining. Hassan Bey said, "My friend, you must be right. There is no other way. My congratulations." Then his face clouded slightly. "But it is, so far, pure theory. We need proof."

We went to work on that, and came up with a plan. Or, rather, Anne did. It looked dangerous to me.

"Not really," she argued, "and there's nobody else who can do it. You can't and Hassan Bey can't." That was all too true. "And besides, darling," she whispered, "I know you won't let me get hurt."

Hassan Bey coughed. *"Neither* of us will let you get hurt," he corrected.

The hardest part, almost, was to fiddle away the day until suppertime. But somehow we managed it.

Again, everybody was at the table for supper—everybody except Anne. The mess boys brought in the soup, but nobody wanted to start until she came.

It seemed to be up to me. "Let's go," I said. "Women are always late, even in the desert." I started in on my soup, my hand shaking.

And then she dashed in, breathless. "I found them!" she exclaimed. "Look, I found them!" She held up a big manila envelope, and particles of sand flew from it.

I was watching faces, but they all seemed equally surprised.

Kronberg asked blankly, "What are they?"

"Cameron's papers! The ones that disappeared!" she breathed. I could see how nervous she was; I hoped the others would think it was excitement.

"Nice work!" I played up. "But give! How and where?"

"I got to thinking about what somebody said last night—about hiding things in the sand," she said. "And then suddenly I thought: why not in the sand *inside* his tent? It would be easier, and safer, and nobody would ever suspect." She caught her breath. "So I straightened out a wire coat hanger and began sticking it into the sand inside his tent. I didn't think it would be very deep, and it wasn't! It was wrapped in a towel."

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It was my turn. "What's in them?" I asked.

"I haven't had a chance to look yet," she said. "I was too excited. But it's report sheets, and analyses, and graphs of some kind. It'll take a lot of work. I'll do it tonight, and see what it's all about."

She looked apologetic. "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'll bet you're all starving. I'd better have something too, although I'm too excited to eat."

She sat down, putting the envelope on the chair beside her. Again I watched faces. Half of them were looking at her, half at the envelope.

It was gloomier than the night before. I was glad when it was over.

"More coffee, Anne?" Jock asked.

"No, thanks," she smiled, standing up. "I can't wait to get to work on these papers. It'll take hours, you know, even to get a clue."

"Couldn't we help you?" It was Loomis, his dark eyes gleaming.

"No, thanks again," she said. "After all, it's my job. It's what I get paid for."

"You can work in the office trailer," Jock offered. "There's more room and better light there."

"You're nice," she said, "but, really, the table in my tent's plenty big enough, and the light's fine. Anyway, you have to make up your own report sheet tonight."

Everybody followed her with his eyes until she left. Then Joe Worth said, puzzled, "Now, what in the world can be so important about those papers, I wonder?"

"We'll know in the morning, Joe," somebody yawned.

Deliberately I changed the subject. I turned to Jock Campbell. "I was wondering," I said, "what are the chances of getting in a little gazelle hunting, now we're here."

They started telling me about desert hunting.

Again it was nearly midnight. The tents were all dark, except for the one where Anne was bent over the table, working. The front flap was up, and light flooded out into the desert. As usual, lights were on in the cook trailer, which was empty, and in the office trailer, where Jock was still working.

I stood in the shadows next to Anne's tent, with a good view of everything. I was glad there was no moon. Back in my own tent, I had put some pillows and rolled-up clothes under the sheet, so it would look as if I were asleep there. I had a shotgun I'd borrowed, saying I was going hunting tomorrow.

Jock stood up and stretched in the office trailer. He seemed to be finished at last. He went into the cook trailer to get something to drink. Then he went to his own tent.

I waited. There was no breath of wind, and no sound except the steady noise of the Diesel generator.

And suddenly I saw a dark figure moving through the tent lines.

For a moment it stopped at my

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tent, as if peering in, and I held my breath. Then it moved on. As it came nearer I shrank deeper into the shadows of Anne's tent. For an instant the light streaming out into the desert was blocked, as the man went in. My heart began to pound.

"You're working late," the man's voice said.

"About finished, though," Anne said.

There was a tremor in her voice. Then silence. The silence was the worst of all. I didn't think I could stand it.

Then she said, "How could you ever bring yourself to do a thing like that?"

I heard a long, heavy sigh. "So you found out," he said.

"Yes," she replied. "I found out. It wasn't hard, once we found these papers. Cameron had done most of the work himself."

"He was smart," the man said. "Too smart. I thought I'd got all his papers. I didn't know he'd hid some of them. Without them, you'd never have guessed."

She seemed almost conversational. "I don't see how you did it. Nobody suspected a thing."

The man chuckled. "It wasn't easy, but it wasn't nearly as hard as you might think. After all, I've been in this business a long time. I know what the readings look like when there is oil, and when there isn't. So I doctored them. I added a little bit here, and took away a little bit there—so the readings would make you think there wasn't any oil out here."

She played up to his vanity. "And will it be a good field?"

"Bigger than anything so far in Bahmaar," he said. "A beautiful dome." Then: "It looked so simple. If you hadn't found those papers—"

Then I heard the choking terror in her voice. "Oh—don't! Don't!"

I threw up the tent flap.

"Get away from her, Jock!" I ordered. Slowly he took his hands away from her throat. His eyes were blazing; it was another Jock Campbell. Then he seemed to sag.

"So you know, too!" he said.

I nodded. I wished I had a pistol instead of the shotgun. It was too long, and the tent too small. I wanted him farther away.

I asked him. "How much was Zaradin going to pay you?"

"Three hundred thousand," he said, so softly it was hard to hear him. "He already paid a third. The second was to come when they got the concession. And the third when they struck oil." His smile was ghastly. "It looked so simple. All the readings went through me, up to Bahmaar. All I had to do was doctor them, so they would think there wasn't any oil here. Then they'd give up the concession, and Zaradin would get it. And when he found oil, people would simply think the company had made a mistake, as in Bahrein." He sighed. "If you just hadn't found those papers—"

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"They're fakes, Jock," I told him. "Anne made them up this afternoon and pretended to find them. We though it must be you, but we didn't have any proof. Now we have."

His eyes blazed again. "You mean—!" With his arm, he gestured toward the faked papers, and it fooled me. I looked at them, and he moved too fast. The gun was too long, and he was too near the end of it. He knocked it aside, and suddenly he had a pistol in his hand.

"Drop the gun, Les!" he whispered fiercely. I had to obey. He kicked the shotgun behind him and pulled Anne up by one arm.

"You're crazy, Jock!" I said. "You'll never get away with it. You can't shoot. You'll wake up the camp."

"I know," he said. He seemed dazed, but his pistol was steady, and his fingers dug deeply into Anne's arm. "I know—but I'm in too deep now. I've got nothing to lose. If you make a move, Les, I'll shoot her. Believe me, I don't want to, but now I come first. I've got to have time."

And then, softly, silently, like a tiger, Hassan Bey was on him. So suddenly that he knocked down the pistol from Jock's hand before he could even fire. I picked it up and threw the shotgun far out into the desert.

"All right, Jock," I said, breathing heavily. "You can sit down in that chair, now, and don't move."

Slowly he obeyed. "Yes," he said, as if in a trance. "Yes, it's all finished now."

Anne collapsed into my arms. "Oh, darling, darling!" she whispered.

Then I asked Jock. "How did you find out Cameron was checking up on you?"

He smiled sadly. "I had bad luck with Cameron. He was too smart and too curious. But mostly it was just plain bad luck. One night he came into the office while I was out for a moment. I had just been putting down his own readings—doctored, of course—and he noticed them." He shook his head. "He knew enough that, no matter what the correction was, it couldn't give the results that I put down. He asked me about it, and I had to make up some story fast. It was pretty good, but it wasn't good enough. I could see he was still puzzled, but I didn't want to press him on it. I thought maybe he'd forget it."

He sighed again. "But he didn't. I got worried when I found he was keeping carbon copies of his own readings. I decided he was making a record to use as evidence. He needed the base magnet corrections, of course, but I suppose he got them watching me through the window, as you said. It would have been perfect proof; they could compare his readings, and the corrections, with the false figures I sent in."

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"And then?" I prompted.

"One day," Jock went on heavily, "when nobody else was in camp, I went through the things in his tent. I found out I was right. This was about a week ago, incidentally. I couldn't take the papers then; he'd have noticed and talked immediately. He seemed to be keeping his mouth shut until he had final proof; nobody else had an inkling what he was doing. And I didn't say anything to him, until the night before you were to come, Anne." He looked despondently at her. "I was in trouble. Once anybody in the company even got suspicious of me, I was lost. I decided he had enough evidence now, and would probably tell you about it. So I went to him and put my cards on the table. It was the only thing I could do. I offered to split fifty-fifty with him if he'd say nothing."

Jock smiled crookedly. "But he wouldn't play. He said he was going to tell you in the morning."

Remembering, I quoted: *"Darned right I'll see her!"*

Jock nodded. "Yes, that's right. When I was sure that's all anybody had overheard, and when I saw it could be given another meaning, I told you that I was the mysterious visitor in the tent. I thought it might throw you off the scent."

"It did, too," I said. "Just as it did when you fired those shots at your own bed."

"Yes," he said, "I thought you might be getting close. I thought that might convince you it couldn't be me, of all people."

"But about Cameron," I reminded him. "When did you do it?"

"I wanted to when he wouldn't cooperate," Jock said, "but I couldn't. It would have made too much noise. I let him think I was defeated, that I'd admit everything in the morning." He shrugged. "He was young; it was simple to fool him. Then, after—afterwards, I grabbed up his papers and buried them. I hoped I had gotten them all but I couldn't be sure. Anyway, I thought nobody else would know, and perhaps they'd blame Dusty."

Anne said, softly, sadly, "Oh, Jock, Jock! How could you ever bring yourself to do it? Not only to poor Jerry, but to the company. To ruin months, years, of exploration! We'll have to do it all over."

He looked up, almost proudly. "Oh, no, you won't. Remember. I'm really a pretty fair geologist. I kept double records, you see. I sent in the fake ones, but I kept the right ones. That was part of my agreement with Zaradin. I had to give him something he could drill by. I kept a drawing of the rock structures, and you'll find it's all you need. It's in the bottom of my foot locker."

He moved his foot in the sand, making meaningless traces. He looked up at me, and his eyes were full of tears. The Jock Campbell I knew—thought I had known—had vanished.

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"Look, Les!" he said urgently. "I know it's all finished with me." He winced. "It's not so much having my head cut off, although that's nothing to look forward to, either." He tried to smile. "That's bad enough," he went on huskily. "But, most of all. I just can't face the people in the company. McLeod and all. They've trusted me so long, and now . . ."

My tongue wouldn't move. I told myself it was maudlin, but it was real.

"Please, Les!" Jock begged. "Just let me have that gun, for just one minute. With only one bullet in it. For myself. I won't hurt any of you, I swear I won't!"

I had to shake my head. "No, Jock," I said slowly. "You know we couldn't trust you with a gun. Not now."

He sighed. "No, I guess not."

And then Hassan Bey spoke. "Of course," he said softly, "if he tries to escape—"

The silence was terrible. I felt Anne's arms tighten around me. Hassan Bey's face was without expression. Jock looked straight at me, long, searchingly, pleadingly.

I took a deep breath. Anne quivered.

Slowly, deliberately, Jock stood up. Then, like a sleepwalker, he moved toward the front of the tent. He walked out into the desert sand, with the light flooding on him, as from a stage. He had taken perhaps six steps when Hassan Bey raised his pistol.

In Arabic he murmured, "In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate!"

I had always heard Arabs were bad shots, but he had to fire only once.

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **AVRAM DAVIDSON**

TITLE: ***The Traditions of His Family***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: On the border of Santa Maria-Hidalgo

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A curious short-short . . . and could anyone other than Avram Davidson have conceived and written it?*

THE MAN WHOM THE PRESIDENT of the Republic greeted with an affable smile and a gesture to the only vacant seat at the table was of late middle-age. He wore a morning coat and striped trousers, both of which had evidently known long and hard usage, but the flower in his buttonhole was fresh.

He bowed to the President and to the others. His manner seemed to change from one second to the next—now truculent, now obsequious, now nervous, now proud, now reserved.

"Don Cesar-Alejandro," the President said warmly, "welcome, welcome."

"You do not know how honored I am, *Señor Presidente,*" the new arrival said. His voice was low, his accent, though markedly foreign, was cultured. "To feel appreciated —sought after—so many years—I —"

His voice broke. Tactfully, the President assured him that the honor was his own, and that of his colleagues. "Allow me," he said. "Some small measure of formality —introductions—Admiral de los Reyes, Minister of Marine and Foreign Affairs; General Murillo, Minister of Defense and Internal Security; Don Emmanuel de la Vizcaya y Sidonia, for many years Minister Without Portfolio, and who even now continues so ably to serve our country as Elder States-

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man, and to give us the benefits of his very esteemed advice."

Don Cesar-Alejandro, having regained his composure, greeted the members of the cabinet with respect and dignity.

The President offered his guest a cigar, and passed the gold-bound humidor around the table. Admiral de los Reyes declined, lit a faintly scented cigarette. Don Emmanuel bent forward to receive a light. General Murillo bit savagely into a cigar and began at once to puff out great clouds of smoke. The President placed his cigar gently in an ashtray of native jadeite, while his guest smoked his as if it had been a long time since he last smoked one.

"You are, of course, a citizen of our country," the President went on, "and, as such, devoted to its well-being, its traditions, its history."

The guest removed his cigar. "Passionately," he said, and put it back.

"It may be, however, that the long hours which the practice of your—"the President hesitated very briefly—"your art," he continued, "require, have precluded as deep a study of these matters as you would unquestionably wish to have made. Nevertheless, no citizen, naturalized or native-born, can be unaware of the Santa Maria-Hidalgo Question." The President's voice, as he said these last words, grew intense.

The Admiral put down his cigarette and pressed his lips together. Old Don Emmanuel's sad nods were almost vigorous. General Murillo bared his teeth, and then bit deeper into the cigar.

"Ah," said the guest, "that great Cause." He sighed, shook his head gravely.

There was a moment's silence.

"Before our country gained its freedom from the tyrannical rule of the beloved Mother-Fatherland, the twin provinces of Santa Maria and Hidalgo were unquestionably considered a part of the captain-generalcy which now forms our own republic." The President paused as if to allow an objection.

"Unquestionably," the Admiral said.

"So-called historical documents purporting to prove the contrary," the President's voice took on notes both injured and oratorical, "are forgeries—blatant forgeries. I do not name the source from which they emanate, I do not name another country, one whose borders march with ours . . ." The President dabbed at his brow.

"Owing to our own unwillingness to force a civilized regimen on a populace not yet ready to embrace it, we humanely refrained from planting our flag throughout the two provinces. But alas, with what result? With the result that a certain nation, not content with already possessing 17.5 times more arable land than we, as well as three deep-water ports compared

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to our one shallow harbor, in full violation of every principal of natural law, and with the utmost barbarity, in the year 1856 occupied by force of arms the Province of Santa Maria and more than three-quarters of the Province of Hidalgo—and upon all this bleeding soil, alas, their flag continues to fly.

"Our dignified remonstrances," the President continued, "have been, in effect, mocked at. Our offers to negotiate, to arbitrate, have been repulsed—and on the trifling grounds that we maintain, naturally, that our possession of part of Hidalgo Province is not an admissible subject for arbitration.

"Meanwhile the neighboring country continues to exploit the natural resources of the rich territories they have plundered from us, and, from long years of propaganda—I might better say, brainwashing—the native populations have been disaffected from us. At least, so their cruel masters claim, though I have no doubt that, given the opportunity, they will flock to our liberating banners."

The guest signified his agreement, and looked about to speak, but the President was not yet finished.

"Only two years previously, when the neighboring republic was convulsed by the revolt against Prime Minister Etchevarria, as a result of which their forces had been largely withdrawn from the Occupied Provinces, General Murillo had prepared plans for lightning thrusts at Santa Maria-Hidalgo. Of course, no one could have foreseen that Etchevarria would flee to Paris quite so soon, or that Nuñez would seize power so swiftly—to say nothing of his returning troops to Santa Maria-Hidalgo almost at once.

General Murillo scowled. "I was *still* ready to attack!" he declared. "The odds meant nothing to me."

"The navy, too, was ready to bombard their ports," Admiral de los Reyes hastened to point out. "It is most unfortunate that at that moment both our ships were laid up for repairs."

"They tied my hands," the General sputtered. "But even now—"

Old Don Emmanuel quavered, "That Nuñez! Ah, there's a clever one for you. He—"

The President said that Nuñez was a devil. "His very cleverness is diabolical. Who is it that alone unites the rival factions that would otherwise tear the country apart in civil war? Nuñez! Who is that has made it clear that at the first sign of our moving troops he will arraign us before the Association of Inter-Hemisphere States as an aggressor? Nuñez! Who is it that plans to go before the U.N. and demand our wretched little quarter of Hidalgo, basing his fantastic claim on those so-called historical documents which are so cleverly forged that they would fool an expert?—and who is so damnably clever a parliamentarian that he might very

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well succeed? Who, indeed, but *Nuñez*."

He spat the name. De los Reyes whispered it. Don Emmanuel shuddered it. Murillo growled it.

Don Cesar-Alejandro, guest of the conclave, nodded sadly. Then he brightened. "Nevertheless," he said, "it is this same Nuñez whom you are intending to honor with a State Banquet. I have not been misinformed?"

The President spread his arms wide. "We have no choice!" he replied. "Things are not as they once were. One cannot assassinate a man in his own capital nowadays with impunity, without exciting the disapproval of the whole world!" Murillo pushed out his lips, curled one side of his mustache. "No, no, *señor*—you, as a former European, will surely understand that present conditions permit only peaceful procedures—at least, for a country so small and un-rich as we. The Northamericans have a saying which goes, I am told, 'If you cannot lick them, join them.' Well, so be it. We will show him that we can be—how do the English put it?—'good sportsmen.' Not for a hundred years has a chief of state of Nuñez's country visited ours. He will be the first. He cannot refuse. We will ask him to lay a wreath on the monument of the Heroes of '56. He will have to accept."

General Murillo paused from picking a shred of tobacco from his teeth, and looked up in surprise. "Where is there a monument to the Heroes of '56?" he asked.

For the first time the President's poise showed signs of breaking down. "We will *erect* one!" he cried. After a moment he continued: "Naturally, he will be received with all the panoply of state. There will be a twenty-one gun salute, a full-dress parade, the ceremony of the wreath-laying, the address to the Special Joint Session of Congress, the inspection of troops, both army and navy, and then—then the State Banquet."

The guest gave a slow, proud smile. He smoothed down his coat. "And it is for this reason you have called for me," he said. "Of course you have your own people experienced in arranging ordinary affairs—cooks, caterers, stewards, *maîtres d'hôtels*—for commercial dinners, family parties, they do well enough, I suppose." His manner was too self-confident to be called scornful. "But for such an affair as you have in mind, for an event so all-important, so exquisitely delicate—" He put the tips of his fingers together, pursed his lips, nodded slowly. "For this you have to call on me. I can arrange it for you to your complete satisfaction."

Then for a few moments he seemed sunken in thought. No one spoke.

"Yes." He looked up, proud, confident. "I shall require the very best of everything—silver, porcelain, napery—"

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"You have only to ask—"

"And, of course, foods and wines. The *best!* For an occasion of this sort, the traditions of my family would not be content with less."

"Anything. Anything at—"

"Many things will have to be ordered from France: the *pâté,* for example, the truffles. Melons? Italy. From Greece, the olives. Cheeses: Denmark. And so on . . . Ah, *señores* . . . if you only knew! The shame I have endured, the humiliation! That a son of my family, with its traditions so great and glorious, should have been reduced—"

He was soothed by the understanding phrases spoken by the President, the Admiral, and Don Emmanuel. They quite appreciated his feelings, they said, quite appreciated them.

The guest smiled, rubbed his hands together. "Now, about the seating arrangements? You have drawn up a tentative plan? Well, well, let me have a look. So. Hm. I see. Nuñez *sits . . . here.* That's all right. He is, according to his pictures, a gentleman of large girth —one who enjoys good food, one would say. Fine. Now—can you tell me—is there anything of which he is particularly fond?"

The President opened a red morocco despatch-box, took out a memorandum, handed it over.

"Sweet champagne!" the guest cried scornfully. "Sweet *pink* champagne! Dear, dear, too bad. Roast beef—how very un-Latin. *Marrons glacés, baba au rhum*—enough. No wonder he weights so much. Well, well, one is not responsible for the bad taste of others."

He folded the paper, put it away, drew himself to his feet. He looked very proud, then—indeed, almost aristocratic. *"Señores,* it is not often that one has the chance to serve one's adopted country and at the same time rise to the glorious traditions of one's family. I see that you are counting on me. I will not fail. Your trust will not be misplaced."

Don Cesar-Alejandro bowed.

The President returned the bow. "We have ample confidence," he said. "Indeed, we have the utmost confidence in you, *Señor* Borgia."

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The Return of Professor Nicholas Welt, Armchair Detective

A WINTER'S TALE

by HARRY KEMELMAN

FRIDAY NIGHTS I DINE AT THE FACulty Club as the guest of my friend Nicholas Welt, Snowden Professor of English Literature. When I left the Law Faculty to campaign—successsfully—for the office of County Attorney, I managed to retain my membership in the Faculty club, and I lunch and dine there several times a week, often with Nicky. But on Friday nights I am there as his guest, presumably to balance the Wednesday nights that he invariably comes to my house for an evening of chess.

When Ellis Stone, County Attorney for Suffolk, dropped in on me late one Friday afternoon in January on a matter of business, I invited him to join us for dinner. Frankly, I was not certain how Nicky would take my presumption in burdening him with another guest —Nicky can be quite sensitive about such things—but it went off very well. He remembered having met Stone at my house and was pleased to see him again.

Ellis Stone is about my age and Nicky is only a year or two older, but his snow-white hair—my own is just beginning to gray at the temples—and his lined, gnome-like face make him seem many years my senior, and he tends to act the part. He shepherded us into the dining room like an indulgent uncle taking a couple of favorite nephews out of school for a treat. He sat between us and urged the richest dishes on us when the waiter came to take our orders.

We talked about the weather, of course. Our winter that year was setting meteorological records. We had had three major snowstorms during the month of December, unrelieved by any perceptible thaw. The pattern had continued into January with a ten-inch snowstorm on New Year's Day, a blizzard three days later that had left sixteen inches of snow, and a cold spell which had kept the thermometer around zero for a fortnight. And when at the end of that period the temperature did go up somewhat, it was only to deposit more snow.

Stone said, "Driving through the

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streets of the city is like running a bobsled course. The snowbanks on either side of you are so high, you can't see the people on the sidewalks. Why, only yesterday we found a man buried in the snowbank. It was on Holgate Street. That's not a main traffic artery to be sure, but it's a fairly well traveled street. He had been there since the big blizzard on the fourth—that's three weeks ago. Imagine the hundreds of people who walked past him in that time and no one the wiser."

"I heard the item on the news broadcast last night," I said. "There is a suspicion of murder, isn't there?"

"No suspicion," said Stone grimly. "It's definitely murder. His head was bashed in and he had been laid out with his hands by his sides as neatly as you please. It's hardly the way a man would fall into a snowbank accidentally."

"It sounds as though it might be interesting," I said.

Stone shrugged. "Just another bread-and-butter case."

"And what is a bread-and-butter case?" asked Nicky.

Stone laughed shortly. "My brother-in-law has a hardware store," he said irrelevantly, "and any time you go in there you are apt to see a woman buying a frying pan or a man buying a garden hose. Now, even if they are regular customers of his, he still may not see them again for a couple of months. So he regards those sales as jam. In a sense, they're almost accidental. But the carpenters, plumbers, and electricians who trade with him—they're his bread-and-butter customers. He can count on seeing them several times a week right through the year. Now in the city we have a sizable population of professional criminals. We can depend on them to give us work week in and week out. So they're our bread-and-and-butter cases."

"And is your procedure any different in bread-and-butter cases?" asked Nicky.

"Well, we usually know who is responsible for a particular job almost as soon as it's done—by the way it's done or by way of rumor through the grapevine, but mostly because we make it a point to know these people. We know how they think and how they feel and how they operate. We know what pressures are at work and what balance of forces obtain at any particular time. By the same token, these people being professional are adept at covering their tracks. So we are usually in the position of knowing who committed a particular crime, but we have no proof.

"Your kind of reasoning and analysis would be useless in these cases, Professor Welt. You'd have no clues to start with. Frankly, there's nothing subtle about our methods in bread-and-butter cases. We don't knock the suspects around, although quite a bit of that

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was done under my predecessor some years back. We just question those involved—at length.

"You see, we're looking for a chink in their armor, so we can get a wedge into it and open them up. We may have to put pressure on one person in order to get *him* to put pressure on *another* who, let's say, may have given a suspect an alibi. Once the alibi is broken, we have our case. Take this present business, for example. When the police lieutenant notified me that John Reilly had got his lumps, I suggested immediately that he pick up Tommy Jordan for questioning, and he grinned at me and told me they already had.

"Strictly speaking, John Reilly was not of the underworld—at least, we were never able to pin anything on him. He was on the fringe, you might say. He owned some slum tenement houses and a bunch of sleazy boarding houses, and he did some bail-bonding and some money lending. A bachelor, about fifty, he was a little jockey of a man, always dressed to the nines, with an exaggerated sense of personal dignity. If you called him John or Reilly, he'd correct you. 'It's *Mister,*' he would say. So he was known around as Mister John.

"He had a little box of an office in the Lawyers' Building right in Courthouse Square. He was never there, but you could leave a message for him with his clerk, Charlie Gerber, and it would reach Mister John. The office was where the people who owed him money left it, and where the janitors of his properties left the rents they collected. As I said, we make it our business to know about these people, and we know that Terry Jordan had it in for Mister John.

"Terry Jordan is a big broth of a lad, good-hearted, but not overly endowed with brains. He came up from juvenile delinquency to small-time crime, but was never very successful at it. He is what is known in his circle as a born patsy—you know, always the last one over the fence. He finally got a job as assistant manager, which is polite for bouncer, at the Hi-Hat Café. There was a waitress there, a big blonde amazon of a girl, called Lily Cherry. He's a good-looking boy, so it's not surprising that after a while she became his girl friend."

"You mean, they became engaged?" asked Nicky.

Stone smiled at him affectionately. "No, Professor, they didn't become engaged, and neither did they get married when he moved into her apartment. It was just a convenient arrangement and they both continued to work at the Hi-Hat. Then Terry got restless again. We picked him up on a burglary charge and he got a year in the pen. There was no question about his guilt, you understand, and it was only his own stupidity that enabled us to pin it on him; but somehow, perhaps from something

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one of the detectives had said, Terry got it into his head that Mister John had something to do with his arrest. There was nothing to it—just an overzealous detective hoping to get a lead. It happens all the time. It's hard to imagine even a light-brain like Terry Jordan having taken it seriously."

"Unless he wanted to believe it," Nicky suggested.

Stone favored him with a quick appreciative glance. "You mean so he could tell himself that it wasn't his fault that he got caught? You've got a point there, Professor. Anyway, there it was. Whether justified or not, Terry thought Mister John had fingered him, and it was known that he thought so. Now, for a supposedly smart man, Mister John then did a foolish thing. Although he knew how Terry felt, nevertheless he began to play up to Lily and in a little while he took Terry's place in the apartment. From the girl's point of view it was a much better deal: it enabled her to stop working; she got a lot of new pretties; and she even had Mister John's convertible."

"Now Terry didn't expect her to sit home and twiddle her thumbs waiting for him to get out of jail. He wasn't married to her and there was probably nothing really intense between them. But this combination of the two things—his hate of Mister John and now John's taking over his girl—"

"King David and Bathsheba," Nicky murmured.

"That's it exactly," said Stone. "And it was also a matter of prestige. Everybody knew he blamed Mister John for his arrest. So this was adding insult to injury. He had to avenge his honor, as it were, or he would be the laughing-stock of his circle. At that, I didn't expect murder, although I would not have been surprised if he had knocked John about a bit. Maybe that's all he planned to do, but just struck a little harder than he intended.

"Terry got out on the second of January. He went to see Lily. We know that. Then he began making inquiries about Mister John. He even went to John's office and asked Gerber where he could find him. I told you he was not very bright."

Stone leaned forward and ticked off the points on his fingers. "What do we have? We know that Terry had a grudge against Mister John—motive. He gets out of prison on the second and he starts looking for him—opportunity. Weapon?—any blunt instrument, a wrench, even a heavy stick, will do. Now method: the fourth, that's just two days later, we have a blizzard; he locates Mister John, steals a car—he's rather gifted that way, but as a matter of fact, in this weather we've been having, lots of folks don't turn their motors off when they stop for awhile—he steals a car and catches

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up with Mister John. Maybe he hits him over the head with something to persuade John to get into the car, but he hits a little too hard and the man is dead. It's around four o'clock and we're having a blizzard. There were very few cars on the road, perhaps none, and no pedestrians. Besides, in that driving snow visibility was only a few feet.

"Terry drives along looking for a place to dispose of the body. There's about six inches of newly fallen snow at the time and both sides of the streets are lined with snowbanks maybe four feet high from the previous storms. He finds a likely spot and pulls over to the side of the road. No one is coming toward him and in his rear-view mirror he sees no one coming behind him.

"He opens the door of the car, picks up the body, and pushes it into the snowbank. He puts more snow on top of it. He knows there'll be another six to ten inches before the storm subsides and then the plows will come along. So he's perfectly safe, and in a few minutes he's back in the car and drives off—"

"What makes you so sure of the time and date?" I asked.

Stone grinned. "We're sure, all right. It wasn't too hard. We cut cores out of the snowbank around the body and then analyzed it the way a geologist would. You see, we knew just when it snowed and how much. The Street Department has records of when they plowed and when they sanded. The combination of the two gave us a pretty accurate record."

"And what did Terry say?" I asked.

"Oh, he denied everything, of course."

"Did you tell him you knew he had been looking for Mister John?"

"He insisted he never got to see him. He maintained that when he went to see Lily, she told him that she and Mister John were going to get married. They were going to drive down to Florida and get hitched on the way. And he insisted that he was looking for Mister John merely to tell him that he bore him no grudge and to wish him luck."

"Quite possible," Nicky murmured.

Stone gave him a wry smile. "You joking, Professor? Why would Mister John want to marry Lily?—especially after he had been living with her for a year. I'll admit she might have thought so. She's not very bright either. In any case, she backed up Terry's story."

"Did she report him missing?" I asked.

Stone shook his head. "No one reported him missing."

"Isn't that in itself suspicious?" I asked. "If he were her fiancé and were missing for three weeks—"

"At first sight it would appear so," said Stone, "but in all fairness

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t doesn't mean too much. Those people wouldn't be likely to go to he police. For all she knew, his absence might merely mean that he had some deal going out of town. Actually, there is no one who would be likely to report his absence. The man was a bachelor. Except for a widowed sister-in-law and her son, he has no family at all.

"And who else would miss him? His clerk? Gerber said he sometimes didn't see Mister John for a couple of weeks at a time, even when he was right around Courthouse Square every day. He knew nothing about the business because that's the way Mister John wanted it. If someone came in to pay money, Gerber took it and gave a receipt. If someone wanted to get in touch with Mister John, he left him a note. Gerber got paid by the month, so he wouldn't even start thinking about it for another week.

"Of course, after a while—say a couple of months—his friends or Reilly or the clerk might begin inquiring around to see what they could learn by the grapevine. Then, if they heard nothing, they *might* risk going to the police. But that would be only after months of absence.

"That leaves his sister-in-law and her son, Frank Reilly. They're respectable people who had as little to do with John as possible. She is a retired schoolteacher. Frank, her son, is about thirty and unmarried and lives with her. He runs a stationery shop not far from where they live in the suburbs. Normally, they wouldn't hear from Mister John for months at a time. The last time they saw him was early in November. It seems Frank had a chance to buy the store he was working in. His boss had to go to Arizona for his health and there was a chance to get it at a bargain price. So Frank went to see his uncle—much against his mother's will, I gather—and Mister John gave him six thousand dollars.

"In going over Mister John's books yesterday that checked out. For obvious reasons, Mister John didn't go in much for keeping records—he didn't even keep his old bank statements. Most of his business, I imagine, was done in cash, but he did pay some things by check and there was a check book in his desk. The stubs showed that three checks for two thousand dollars each had been made out to Reilly on November seventh."

"Three checks?"

"According to Frank, that was so that he could dicker. He was to offer two thousand first and then four thousand if that didn't work, and finally the six if it was absolutely necessary. I gather that Frank, who is a kind of arty young man—a little on the swish side, to tell the truth—thought it undignified to haggle and didn't try to. Obviously, he is not one of the great financial brains of our time, but he seems like a decent sort and

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he's devoted to his mother who is crippled with arthritis and hobbles about on a cane. The big advantage of the store from his point of view was that it was located not far from his mother's house and he could run over whenever she needed him."

We had finished our dinner and at Nicky's suggestion we adjourned to the Commons Room for coffee. The waiter moved a coffee table in front of the fireplace and set armchairs around it. When he had served us and we were once more alone, I said flatly, "I don't see that you have much of a case."

"We don't," Stone admitted, "not yet. But we have the man."

"But you can't keep him," I insisted.

"We can hold him for questioning—and we'll question him, all right. We'll take him over every minute of his life since he got out of jail. We'll question him over and over. And if he contradicts himself just once, we'll have our wedge."

"You could probably get me to confess under the same treatment," I said.

Stone flushed. He was on the point of replying in anger, but managed to control himself. "We fight fire with fire," he said stiffly. "We know he killed him—"

"I can see why you think he killed him," Nicky interrupted, "but I can't understand why he buried him."

Stone turned to Nicky very pointedly, as if to ignore me. "Naturally he wouldn't want the body found. He did it for the same reason that a murderer buries his victim in the woods or ties a weight around the body and dumps it over a bridge."

Nicky shook his head. "Surely, Mr. Stone, you see the difference between burying a man in a snowbank on a busy street and burying him in the woods or dumping him into the ocean?"

"What's the difference?" Stone demanded.

Nicky ventured a wry smile. "In the latter case, the action is accompanied by the hope, not unjustified, that the body will *never be found at all*—or if it is, then *found in an unrecognizable condition*. But in burying a man in a snowbank on one of the streets of a city, there is the certainty that he *will be found* and *readily recognized when found*. He will have been preserved in deep freeze, as it were. On the basis of our normal weather the discovery would be delayed only a few days at the most. Even with the extraordinary winter we have been having, the murderer could only hope for a delay of a few weeks or so."

"Well, it would give him that much more time for a getaway," said Stone.

Nicky shook his head decisively "But Terry didn't try to get away, did he? Your police had no difficulty in picking him up, did they?

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What I want to know is: why didn't the murderer just open the door of the car, push the body of his victim out, and then ride on? The body would have fallen at the foot of the snowbank and even if discovered almost immediately, there would be a good chance that it would be assumed he was the victim of a hit-and-run driver. If the body were wholly or partly covered by the falling snow, there would then be a good chance the body *would* be hit by a passing motorist, or even by the snowplow. In either case, the resultant contusions would probably serve to conceal the blow on the head, and the murder could easily have passed as an accident."

"He might have panicked," Stone suggested.

"Then he would have been even more likely to have dumped the body without thinking and run," Nicky retorted. "No, I'm afraid you don't understand the full implication of my question. What was the effect of burying the body in the snowbank? *To delay its discovery at least a few days.* Since it is such an unusual action, it is fair to assume that *this is precisely what the murderer wanted.*"

"What could he hope to gain by such a delay?" Stone demanded.

Nicky pursed his lips as though he had bit into a sour lemon. "I'm sure there any any number of possibilities, but one suggests itself to me immediately. If he had a post-dated check of Mister John's, he might hope to cash it."

Stone raised an appreciative eyebrow. "You mean if John had been known to be dead, the bank would automatically stop payment on any check dated after the date of his death. It's an interesting possibility, Professor. It could be that Terry didn't intend to kill Mister John or even to beat him up, only to shake him down for a large sum of money. That might explain why he wasn't afraid to make open inquiry for him.

"All right then: he braces Mister John for a stake. But he's not taking fifty or a hundred dollars. He demands a thousand or two. 'I don't carry that kind of money around,' says Mister John. 'I'll tell you what, I'll give you a check.' So he writes out a check but he dates it ahead a few days 'accidentally on purpose,' planning to stop payment on it. That's the sort of thing I can imagine Mister John doing.

"But it doesn't work. Terry spots the future date and in his anger he wallops John over the head. But he hits too hard, so now he has a body on his hands. If he can keep the death secret for a few days—"

Quite suddenly the eagerness went out of Stone's voice. "It won't do, Professor. Terry would realize that to cash the check would tie him to the murder. He may be dumb, but he's not that dumb."

An idle thought had been pecking at my mind and now the pieces

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were all falling into position. "Look here, Nicky, I think I see what you're driving at. You're taking this business of Mister John's wanting to marry Lily at face value."

Nicky's nod of encouragement urged me on. "Here's a big amazon of a woman, and Mister John is a little shrimp of a man. Her handsome lover comes out of jail and is now available. Naturally she prefers him to Mister John. Well, she's big enough to handle Mister John. She doesn't have to go looking for him—he's at her apartment. She has a car—his. They were planning to go to Florida and get married. Naturally, she'd need clothes and she'd put it up to Mister John. So he would sit down and write her a nice big check."

Nicky smiled. "And why would he give her a post-dated check?"

Several reasons suggested themselves to me, but before I could offer them, Stone growled, "Theories—just a bunch of fine theories that don't mean anything. Now I can settle this post-dated check business right now. We went through Mister John's books with a fine-tooth comb. There wasn't much to go through, so we couldn't have overlooked anything. There were no checks missing from his check book. Every check that had been issued had a stub made out."

"Have you received this month's statement of his account from the bank?" Nicky asked.

"We asked them for it, and they promised to prepare it right away. I imagine it's on my desk now."

"Then I am prepared to make a wager," said Nicky. He drew an old-fashioned coin purse from his trouser pocket. Unsnapping the catch, he poked around in its depths with a lean forefinger. Then with a faint sigh he drew out a quarter and placed it primly on the coffee table in front of him.

Stone smiled. He tossed a quarter onto the table so that it landed next to Nicky's coin. "All right, you're faded. What's your bet?"

"I am prepared to wager that in the bank statement you think is now resting on your desk, you will find a check for two thousand dollars made out to Frank Reilly."

"Frank Reilly, the nephew? You mean that he did manage to get the business for four thousand dollars and kept the rest for himself?"

"I mean that the story of three checks being made out so that he could dicker with the original owner of the store is all poppycock."

"What's wrong with it?" asked Stone.

"It's not the way you dicker. The spread is too great. If the asking price is six thousand dollars, you might start with four and then compromise on five or five thousand five hundred. But you wouldn't arrange to go from two to four to six in big jumps. Frank, not being much of a businessman, might not realize it, but Mister John cer-

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tainly would. Besides, I don't think Mister John would just hand over six thousand dollars to the likes of Frank and tell him to go ahead and buy a business."

"What's the matter with Frank?" asked Stone.

"He's thirty and unmarried and has no trade or profession. And since his mother was a schoolteacher it was probably not for lack of opportunity or because of parental opposition. He is probably what we used to call 'a mama's boy.' I'd say he's had a succession of small jobs ending up with that of clerk in a neighborhood stationery shop. My guess is that Mister John would have looked over the business very carefully, saw that it was a good buy, and then arranged for Frank to make payment in three equal monthly payments. So he made out the three checks and dated two of them ahead."

"But the stubs all show the same date," Stone objected.

"The stubs, yes, because he probably made them out first and all at once. But then in making out the checks, he would naturally date them as he wanted them paid—one for November, one for December, and the third for January. Now that last check was dated January 7, and it was very important that the bank should have no reason to suspect that Mister John was anything but alive on that day."

"Are you trying to say that it was his nephew who killed him?"

"I am saying that Frank buried him in the snowbank. I don't think he'd have the nerve to kill him. I suspect that it was his mother, that dear old schoolteacher, who killed him, probably with that same stick that she hobbles around on."

"But why?" asked Stone.

"Because he was going to get married, of course." Nicky paused. "Don't you see? He came out to them—Mister John probably did visit them only a couple of times a year, as they said. But I'd bet it was not because *they* discouraged *him*.

What was there in that household that would attract a man like Mister John? The only reason he visited them at all, and that as little as possible, was because they were his only living relatives. Those were undoubtedly duty calls he made.

"But I'm sure Frank saw him more often. Living on a schoolteacher's pension and a clerk's wages, they must have needed help every now and then—fifty or a hundred dollars that Mister John would give Frank in cash. It stands to reason that Frank would not have approached him for six thousand if he had not received smaller sums in the past.

"Now the old lady might have thought that the sun rises and sets on her darling boy, but she was under no illusion about his capacity to make a living. What would happen to him after she died and her pension would stop? Well, there was always Uncle John to help the boy

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out. But now, at the age of fifty, John was planning to marry! That meant that even while he lived, the money would not be forthcoming so readily. And in the event of his death, instead of the money going to Frank, it would go to John's widow.

"So she struck with her cane. And then she had her son carry the body to the car in the garage. That precious pair, with the body of Mister John making a grisly third, probably drove out with the intention of dropping it on the side of the road—until they thought of the final payment that had to be made on the store."

Stone stared at Nicky, speechless for the moment. Then he jumped up. "There's bound to be somebody still in the office. I'm going to phone and check that bank statement."

"There's a phone booth in the hall outside," I offered.

While Stone was gone, Nicky and I waited in silence. There were questions that I wanted to ask, but somehow it did not seem fair while Stone was gone. Nicky seemed perfectly at ease, but I noticed that his fingers were drumming on the arm of his chair.

In a few minutes Stone returned. "Pick up the marbles, Professor," he said. "The check was there all right, just as you deduced."

I could not resist a sly dig. "Then you mean, Nicky," I asked innocently, "that Terry had absolutely nothing to do with the murder?"

Nicky turned on me sharply. "He had everything to do with it!"

"What did he do?" Stone and I asked, almost in unison.

"He got out of jail, that's what he did. That triggered off the whole affair. I imagine that Mister John was very much in love with the girl—he must have been to take the risk he did. I think they were happy together. I think that between the two, Terry and Mister John, Lily would probably have chosen the older man. But Mister John could not be sure of that. All he could think of was that this handsome young man was back on the scene and that Lily might go back to him. So he asked her to marry him as a means of tying her to him. And when she told Terry, he probably realized that it was a fine opportunity for her. Being intrinsically a decent young man, he wished her luck and assured her that he had no hard feelings. And then he tried to see Mister John to assure him that he had nothing to fear from him."

"Like the hero in a soap opera," Stone remarked.

"Precisely," said Nicky. "People like Terry get their ideas of morality and ethics, as do the rest of us, from the books they read and the plays they hear and see." He could not forbear to add with a frosty little smile, "You have to realize that, Mr. Stone, in order to understand them."

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(Continued from other side)

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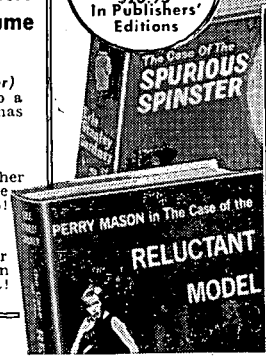

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